TEXT HIGHLIGHTS: Diaries updates, key events, brief analysis and relating news articles in timeline

Overview

It’s name derived from Greece word ‘Aegyptus’ meaning for “dark soil”

Long known for its pyramids and ancient civilization, Egypt is the largest Arab country and has played a central role in Middle Eastern politics in modern times.

Arabs introduced Islam and Arabic in 7th century and ruled the hitherto predominantly Christian country for six centuries.
Mamlukis took control around 1250.

Egypt was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1517.

After completion of the Suez Canal, Egypt became a transport hub but also fell in debts.

Britain took over control of Egypt in 1882.

Egypt received in 1922 nominal independence from the UK.

Kingdom of Egypt (1922–53) held an enthronement rite for its last ruling king, Farouk I.

Headship since independence: King Farouk Monarchial Head

King Farouk I of Egypt (Fārūq al-Awwal) (11 February 1920 – 18 March 1965), was the tenth ruler from the Muhammad Ali Dynasty and the penultimate King of Egypt and the Sudan, succeeding his father, Fuad I of Egypt, in 1936. His full title was "His Majesty Farouk I, by the grace of God, King of Egypt and Sudan, Sovereign of Nubia, of Kordofan, and of Darfur." He was overthrown in the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 and forced to abdicate in favor of his infant son Ahmed Fuad, who succeeded him as Fuad II of Egypt. He died in exile in Italy.

In 1952 the Egyptian military staged a coup and overthrew the British backed monarchy acquired full sovereignty. President Gamal Abdul Nasser pioneered Arab nationalism and the non-aligned movement, while his successor Anwar Sadat made peace with Israel and turned back to the West.

Egypt nationalized the Suez-canal four years later, in 1956.

President Gamal Abdel Nasser sought to create his own brand of Arab socialism and nationalism and propagated it as a secular Pan-Arab ideology. Using an extensive intelligence apparatus and an elaborate propaganda machine, he promoted a cult of personality projecting himself as the “Man of the People.” He built the Aswan High Dam with the Soviets financial aid. He ruled Egypt in a one-man, one-party dictatorship and crushed all dissent, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. Today the Muslim Brotherhood is in power and Nasserism is in the dustbin of history. Nasser left a legacy of military dictatorship in Egypt and inherited the wind.

President Gamal Abdel Nasser died of heart attack on the 28th of September, 1970, his sudden death was an outpouring of national grief in
Egypt, the funeral procession in Cairo drew more than five million mourners as many others mourned throughout the Arab world.

October, 1970 VP Anwar El-Sadat, sworn into office as president.

President Anwar El-Sadat assassinated by an army assassins fire while he musters military parade in Cairo on the 6th October, 1981, held in honor of the October, 1973 war against Israel.

Air Marshal Mohammed Hosni Mubarak the former Captain in the Egyptian Air Force, the latter an Air-Marshal in the Egyptian Air Force succeeded. Air Marshal Mohammad Hosni Mubarak, came into in the death of President Anwar El-Sadat on the 15th October, 1981, reaffirmed in office by a Yes-No referendum vote for a six-year term, events to go the Anwar El-Sadat ways until he forcibly resigns in early February, 2011.

President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak survived several assassination attempts, the one when he appears as OAU guest in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa in May, 1995 was the most serious attempts of all.

On the 11th of February, 2011 - The Nasser (1952) to Mubarak (2011) era usually known as the ‘Republic Era’ is ended due to the depth of resentment over Hosni Mubarak three decades of authoritarian rule, he finally resigned, and handed over power to a High Command of the Armed Forces (HCAF).

Arab Republic at Northeastern corner of Africa.

Egypt: is a country situated mainly within North Africa, with its Sinai Peninsula forming a land bridge in Southwest Asia, making it a transcontinental state.

It's name derives from an ancient name Ht-ka-ptah, which meant House of the Ka of ptah. Ptah was one of the early Egyptian gods. According to historians, it is the Greeks who modified the name Ht-ka-ptah to Aegyptus to refer to the Egyptian god as they had difficulty pronouncing the h at the beginning of the original name. Egypt is home to one of the world's oldest, continuous, and the forbearer of world civilization. It's history backdates about 5000 years, a unified kingdom arose about 3200 B.C and a series of dynasties ruled in Egypt for the next millennium. The Pyramids: believed to have been constructed between 3000 BC and 1800 BC, the pyramids located west of River Nile are testimony to ancient Egyptian knowledge
and engineering skills. The pyramids of Giza are the most widely known among the 10 pyramid sites. Ancient Egyptian architecture and art. Valley of the Kings, the royal tombs of Egypt, and the Sphinx. Occupied and made a British colony in 1881/2 and became a protectorate in 1914, received nominal independence in 1922 from the UK when a constitutional monarchy was established, acquired full sovereignty with the overthrow of the British backed monarchy on the 23rd of July, 1952. The Egyptian military staged a coup and overthrew the monarchy in 1952. In the person of the de-facto leader of the coup namely Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser. Both subsequent leaders of Egypt after Nasser, Anwar El-Sadat and Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, the former a Captain in the army, the latter a Marshal in the Air Force, inevitably came from the institution with the most prestige in the country. A revolt against the King Farouque and the Royal family overthrew the monarchy in a bloodless military coup known as "the 1952 Revolution" within few days. It was led by middle rank officers namely, the "Free Officers Movement", dethroned and sent the King exile to Italy, Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser, met with the latter president Anwar El Sadat in Mankabad, who also based there. Colonel Gamal Abdel-Nasser, Mohammed Naguib, Amr, Al-Baghdadi, Zakaria Mohedin, Hussain Al-Shafi, Kameldine Hussain, Ali Sabri and Anwar El-Sadat and other revolutionary army figures formed the clandestine network that founded in January 1939 what came to be known as the "Mankabad oath" and formed the nucleus of the "Free Officers Movement" it was to overthrow the monarchial head, King Farouk, in 1952 then drive out the British, and nationalized the Suez-canal four years later, in 1956.

Since then, the Egyptian military has thrived on the windfalls of it's association with Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, a hero and champion of not only Egyptians, but of all Arabs. Well, Anwar El- Sadat's part in the 1952 revolution was, according to historians, dubious. then General Muhammed Naguib came up to the symbolic headship of the newly Arab Republic of Egypt (ARE), took control of the nation, and heralded a new period of modernization and social reforms in Egypt, two years later he forced to resign and retired from public life by Colonel Gamal Abdel-Nasser, the real architect of the 1952 movement, he was the obvious choice to succeed General Muhammed Neguib, Egypt's post-monarchial head of state on the 17th of November, 1954. Gamal Abdel Nasser, was the second president of Egypt from 1956 until his death. Along with General Mohammed Naguib, the first Egyptian president, he led the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 which overthrew the monarchy. Gamal Abdel Nasser, nicknamed the "the great Arab-African" although his status as "leader of
the Arab world", severely tarnished by the Israelis victory over the Arab armies in the six days war, many in the Arab populace still view Nasser as an Architect of the Arab nationalism and symbol of the Arab dignity and freedom. He was also known for his charisma and vision of African unity and Arab grandeur, was instrumental in the establishment of the international non-Aligned movement along with Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, and Ahmed Sokarno of Indonesia. He is well known for his nationalist policies, and version of pan Arabism, also referred to a Nasserism, which won a great following in the Arab world during the 1950s and 1960s. His vice president Anwar El-Sadat, became a compromise candidate to succeed Gamal Abdel Nasser when he died of sudden heart attack on the 28th of September, 1970, his sudden death was an outpouring of national grief in Egypt, his funeral procession in Cairo drew more than five million mourners as many others mourned throughout the Arab world. Mr. Anwar El-Sadat, he who sworn into office as president in October, 1970, born in the village of Mit Aboul Kom, northwest of Cairo, he graduated from a military academy in 1938 at a time when the nationalist fervor was running high in Egypt. Following Premier Nahas Pasha's "Capitulation" to the British demands to reoccupy the country "In case of international threat of war", he previously was given various posts like president of the National assembly, vice president and secretary general of the single party, the National Union of Popular Forces NUPF, which later became the Arab Socialist Union (ASU). A well deserved nomination to replace the late Mr. Gamal Abdel Nasser, in May 1971, Mr. Anwar El-Sadat launched his "Corrective Revolution" as president and put behind bars the most prominent personalities in the Nasser regime. A year later, he expelled about twenty thousand Russians and started a "de Nasserisation" process that included the nationalization of factories, real estates, and farms "sequestrated" by Gamal Abdel Nasser in acts of such populism, to make way for a socialist society.

It is to be recalled that, the Arab Republic of Egypt had been engaged in three major wars b/n 1948 to 1973, those of the 1956 (of the Suez-canal war), the June, 1967 (of the war of six days) and the October, 1973 war (of the war of Yum Kipur or war of seventeen days) all ended up when Egypt and other Arab nations were beaten by Israel, the Israeli victory over the Arab armies in the seventeen-day war was the last and ever devastating on the Arab-Egyptian public. Only two days after Sadat's assassination, an armed gang in Asyut fought a four hour gun battle with local security forces. Asyut, a University town in Upper Egypt, has long been considered a barometer of Egyptian political mood. News reports at the time confirmed that Anwar El-Sadat passed away from his
wounds two hours later, nine others were killed on the spot, including Anba Bishop Samuel of the Coptic-church, chief Chambarlain Hassan Allam, and presidential secretary Fawzi Abdul-Hafez, Mr. Sadat practically unmourned by his compatriots, only foreign dignitaries, almost all from the USA, Europe and Israel, joined the Egyptian leadership at Sadat’s funeral. He was considered something of a hero, particularly after his peace initiatives with the Israelis. The late president Anwar El-Sadat led Egypt from September, 1970 for further eleven years, he under-gone a fundamental policy shift that appeared a surprising move towards the Arab-Israeli politics, he was known for his move to switch-off enmity with Israel following the war of the seventeen days in October, 1973, earned him a political upper-hand over the Israelis, later enabled him regain control of the Sinai-peninsula, part of Egypt, that lost in the war in 1967, in return for peace with Israel, in accordance of the so called "Camp-David peace agreement" of 1979, signed in the United States, thus Egypt has conducted military exercises in the region along with the western countries. He led Egypt further until the date he assassinated by an army assassins fire while he stood reviewing a ceremonial military parade in Cairo on the 6th October, 1981, held in honor of the October, 1973 war against Israel. People seemed to mind their own business or go ahead with the routine of preparing for Id Al Adha, the feast of Abrahams sacrifice of his son, Issac, as if nothing had happened, yet only a month to the day before he was killed, the President stood up as a truck from a convoy of vehicles four abreast pulled along side the VIP grand stand "thinking that the troops on board were about to salute him". A group of men in soldiers uniform sprinted from the truck and, threw tear gas and followed it up with a massive spray of automatic fire from their Russian made Kalashnikov machine-guns while other armed men showered the dais with bullets from the stationary vehicle, twenty others were seriously injured, and two of the assailants were shot dead. That Muslim fanatics group of soldiers could break regulations and carry live ammunition on a ceremonial parade is also a pointer that the suicide commandos were not acting alone. Yet to western countries, Mr. Anwar El-Sadat was something of a peace-maker with the Israelis, particularly after his peace initiatives. Many of the assailants were guilty of belonging to the banned IB, an off-shoot of the Islamist movement of Egypt, which has recruited thousands of Egyptians to fight for the Islamist causes at the time. Both subsequent leaders of Egypt after Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar El-Sadat and Mohammed Hosni Mubarak the former captain in the Egyptian Army, the latter an Air-Marshal in the Egyptian Air Force inevitably came from the institution with the most prestige in the country.
Air Marshal Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, came-up to replace him since he nominated to the post, has been in power since his predecessor Anwar El Sadat's assassination, and events to go onto the Anwar El-Sadat peace initiatives, as Egypt has forever remained in the orbit of the west. Believed, the United States and Israel would not hesitate to use any means at their disposal to influence events to go the Anwar El-Sadat ways. The head of state Mr. Hosni Mubarak soon to end his fifth-six year term in October, 2011, has survived several assassination attempts, the one when he appeared as OAU guest in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa in May, 1995 was the most serious attempts of all. The Chief of state, who chaired the Defense & Security council of the nation as well as the ruling-party, making him the most powerful man in Egypt. The "Muslim Brotherhood" was the Arab world’s oldest political group was founded by Sheik Al-Banna during the British occupation, in 1928, as an organ of social reform. It's philosophy was influenced by a theologian namely, Sayyid Qutb, who advocated the overthrow of Egypt's secular government and was eventually hanged. The IB is known to be Egypt's most powerful opposition group, which banned from politics the time since, the "Free Officers Movement" came as figurehead, has been biding it's time for nearly over eighty years, and is a potent force to reckon with. "Islam is the solution", as the IBs slogan claims.

The IB gained a 20% of the seats in the parliament since 2004, despite far from free the 2004 elections were believed Egypt's most democratic in decades, since then the Egyptian president, has dismantled the judicial oversight of elections, and now political analysts expect a widespread vote-rigging in the up-coming, November, 2011 parliamentary elections, despite the opposition calls to boycott the votes, the Islamic Brotherhood (Ahwan Musleemin) is likely to participate again with less influence on who succeeds Mr. Mohammed Hosni Mubarak in 2011 by participating in elections in exchange for wider political movement to spread it's religious ministry and it's network of social services, by building their political base, many believed, the Muslim-Brotherhood is not yet strong enough to defeat the incumbent's hand-picked successor, likely his son Mr. Gamal Mubarak, the group seems to be waiting until the time is right to mount a significant challenge, in ten or fifteen years time, they think they rise to power, and will own Egypt, a development that would bring about massive repercussions throughout the Middle east and beyond, say an Egyptian political analyst. The Islamist IB's goal, at least for the moment, is to cultivate a moderate, democratic image in the eyes of fellow Egyptians as much as with the west. The president's son and the ruling party General-secretary, Mr. Gamal Mubarak, might appear onto the post upon eventual
succession to the ailing chief of state. The NDP, has done and will do anything to retain it's 33 years grip on power as repression and intimidation have alienated from a state to state. As Mr. Hosni Mubarak is 83 years old and in failing health, many segments of the Egyptian society, not least embattled democracy activists, fiercely dislike recent moves to take the road of the Haffez Al-Assad of Syria by installing elder-son Gamal Mubarak as dynastic nepotism. The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) knows full well that it can not get a chance for another term in a free and fair election, the ruling party has secured about 80 % of the seats in Parliament, while analysts claim that many independent candidates that secured the remaining seats have links to the ruling party. The IB, which has been outlawed since 1954, but fields candidates as independents, made a surprisingly strong showing in elections in 2005, winning 20% of parliament's seats. However, thousand's of it's members were arrested in crackdowns over the past decades and it failed to win a single seat in elections held late, 2010, which believed the vote was heavily marred by fraud that allowed the NDP to win all but a small number of the chamber's 518 seats.

Major Conflicts

Arab-Israeli War
When: 1948 (1948-1949)
Who: Arabs against Israelis
Why: The Gaza Strip
Outcome: Egypt acquired the Gaza Strip

2nd Arab-Israeli War
When: 1967
Outcome: Israel took charge of Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights.

The Suez Canal Crisis
When: October 1956
Who: Britain, France and Israel
Why: Egypt’s decision to nationalize Suez Canal

Outcome: A ceasefire

After a sweeping non-violent uprising forced the Tunisian despotic ruler Zine El-Abedine Ben Ali out of office, two weeks before the demonstration in Egypt, like Arabs everywhere, the Egyptians were mesmerized by the popular uprising in Tunisia. They Egyptians watched the Jasmine Revolution untold on Satellite TVs and saw Zine El-Abedine Ben Ali, Tunisia’s ruler of more than two decades, flee. And then of course, thousands defied the government's curfew and filled the streets and squares of downtown Cairo on the 25th of January, 2011, the first day of protests, in a resounding rejection of the longtime leader's attempt to hang onto power with promises of reform and a new government, organized demonstrations in Cairo called for an immediate stand-down of the deeply unpopular regime of Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, and chanted "enough is enough, there must be a transition". Up to Friday, the 4th of February, 2011, Egypt's people power revolution known as the "Nile revolution" was by and largely peaceful, Egypt's youth snapped with rage, about seventeen Police-stations within Cairo were set-ablaze, with protesters stealing firearms and ammunition, setting not only many radical IB suspects jailed political prisoners, but also hundreds of suspected criminals, freed. Any Police-car within reach was torched, estimated dozens of Police-trucks in Cairo, Alexandria and Suez burned. The blunt and brutal response of the anti-riot Police, the regime's renowned hit-force, were unable to prevent the crowd from gathering and had to fire tear gas to get it disperse, and then Tanks and armored personnel carriers fanned out across the city of eighteen million plus guarding key government buildings, but the curfew was largely ignored, in the meantime, plainclothes-Policemen estimated as many arrest people, may shot wantonly by sharp shooters to spread terror, some were recklessly stabbed with knives by the ruling party-thugs, many more were seriously injured by overzealous policemen, but demonstrators have made a unified and coordinated plans to the finishing line, as their ultimate goal is freedom, equality, justice, liberty and prosperity. Since the largest anti-government protests in decades began on Tuesday, the 25th of January, 2011 at the Tahrir (liberation), the landmark square that had been a symbolic center of an uprising to break political grip of the nation’s leaders since 1952. Best of all, the much predicted violence b/n the Islamic militants and the Coptic-Christian minority, which the ruling-NDP had for years deliberately used to discourage protests, never came to pass, on this matter, the president usually enjoys the benefit of the doubt.
Despite the death toll rose to nearly 850, some three thousand injuries have been reported since, the riot have been spreading to other main cities like the coastal city of Alexandria, Suez, Al-Shubra, Assuna, Asiyut, Ismaelia, Manssura, Al-Airish and Aswan, according to medical and security officials and witnesses at the demonstration. The demonstrators were not satisfied with the president's actions to address the public discontent as they have legitimate grievances onto the incumbent president. The president of thirty years fired his cabinet, appointed the chief of intelligence General Mohammed Omar Suleiman as VP, creating a new position which did not exist since the death of ex-president Gamal Abdel Nasser, of course, the late president Anwar El-Sadat was served as VP under the late Gamal Abdel Nasser before Nasser passed away in August 1971, but such position have been avoided since then, and now this time Mubarak appointed Air-Marshall Ahmed Shafiq, the Civil Aviation minister and his former colleague in the Egyptian Air Force, to form a new government, promising more reforms, which many Egyptians doubt he will deliver. The "most dangerous moment for a bad government is when it begins to reform itself", say political thinkers. President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak 83, confronted with the most dire threat to his three decades of authoritarian rule, faced his nation for the first time since the unrest began, on the 25th January, 2011. In a TV address, he made vogue promises of social reform in what is likely interpreted as an attempt to cling to power rather than a genuine pledge to an orderly transfer of power, to generally solve Egypt's pressing problems, or voluntarily stepped aside in the interest of the nation, according to analysts. He has promised not to run again but insists on serving-out the remainder of his term to supervise a peaceful transfer of power. He also has vowed to introduce political reforms and to fight corruption, promises he has made several times over the decades of his rule. I will not resign, he defiantly said, and has vowed he would not flee the country, saying in a nation address "Egypt is my dear homeland, I have lived in it, I fought for it and defended it's soil, sovereignty and interests, on it's soil I will die. History will judge me and all of us". Leaders of Mubarak's ruling-NDF party, including his son, Gamal Mubarak, and his longtime aides, resigned on Saturday the 5th of February, 2011. Gamal Mubarak, a 47 years old banker-turned politician, would not run for president, addressing longtime fears that he was being groomed for the post. The government's talks with the opposition including the IB in years marking a startling shift in policy after years of crackdowns by the western backed regime against the Islamists. It also raised the possibility the group could be on it's way to official recognition of it's key role in Egyptian society, but some Middle
East analysts quoted as saying on the matter, "the Egyptian president missed his cue for a "dignified exit" from thirty years of iron-fisted rule. It's not clear whether Egypt's constitution allows the newly appointed VP to assume any of the president's duties while he is serving in office. As the Egyptians were inspired by the Tunisians, in the first week of the protest, the Tahrir (liberation) square became the battleground b/n pro-and anti-Mubarak groups, with the military unable or unwilling to intervene. Since the occurrence of the French revolution for example, scholars of revolution are familiar with the outcomes of demonstration effects, some going to the extent of counting as one powerful cause of the revolution and it's tendency to spread to other countries by the sheer effect of it's inspirational appeal. The Egyptian people to have the chance to chart a future for new, and more democratic Egypt. For that reason, it needs to be an orderly and a peaceful transition of power to a real democracy, not faux-democracy, meaning that, an orderly transition to a government that is responsive to the aspirations of the Egyptian people. One thing is certain: a new reality is waving around North Africa and the Arab world as a whole, Mr. Hosni Mubarak can no longer preside over an authoritarian government. Even if Mubarak is able to withstand the protests, he can not continue the leadership style he had before the protests erupted, and the west needed to be on the right side of history and not trying to keep Hosni Mubarak in power against all odds", said an influential US diplomat on the issue.

Of course, Hosni Mubarak's Egypt has been helpful on a range of global issues important to the west, such as fighting terrorism, the Arab-Israeli peace talks and onto containing the influence of Iran in the region. But the crises seems to be spreading through the region like a wildfire, since the people of Sudan have also joined it's northern neighbors onto the bandwagon. US president Barack Obama must also deal with his own promises to Egyptians and other in the Middle East, shortly after taking office in 2009, the president delivered a land mark speech in Cairo, where in an eloquent address he pointedly told his hosts that "governments must reflect the will of their people". Having delivered such a speech, Barack Obama is hard-pressed now to throw his support behind a repressive ruler at the expense of crowds clamoring for democratic rights. Hosni Mubarak, a former Egyptian Air-force commander came to power after the October, 1981 assassination of his predecessor Anwar El-Sadat by Islamic radicals. Throughout his rule, he showed a near obsession with stability, using rigged elections and unpopular Police-Force accused of widespread torture to ensure his control. He resisted calls for reform even as public bitterness grew over corruption, deteriorating infrastructure and rampant poverty in
a country where 40% live below or near the poverty line. Egypt's military promises to lift the 30-years state of emergency when the "current situation" has ended, as thousands gather for fresh protests. President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, who until the end seemed unable to grasp the depth of resentment over his three decades of authoritarian rule, finally resigned on the 11th of February, 2011, handed over power to the High Command of the Armed Forces (HCAF), administers the affairs of the country. The announcement of Hosni Mubarak fall was greeted with the loudest cheer in Egyptian history, people power had come and triumphed in the Arab world's strategically most important country. Government officials put the number of protesters killed during the uprising at 365, but human rights groups and others have said the figure is much higher according to independent groups, over 800 people have died as of the 7th of March, 2011. Egypt's military leaders under the High Command of the Armed Forces dissolved both councils of the bicameral parliament, known as the Majlis Al-Shura (the Advisory council) and the Majlis Al-Shaab (the People's Assembly), which is widely ridiculed as illegitimate, and suspended the Egyptian Constitution, which broadly restricts presidential candidates against the ex-president, to replace the chief of intelligence, and promised to hold Egypt's first real multi-party elections within six months, meeting the demands of the protesters who have been keeping-up pressure for immediate steps to transition to a democratic civilian rule after forcing the President out of power. The ruling High Command of the Armed Forces led by the ex-Minister of Defense, General Mohammed Hussain Al-Tantawi pledged to an eventually hand-over of power to an elected civilian government and reassured western allies that Egypt will abide by it's peace treaty with Israel after the ouster of the president, Mohammed Hosni Mubarak. The estimated 500,000-strong Internal Security Services (Muhabarat) are accused of some of the worst human rights abuses in the suppression of dissent against Hosni Mubarak's nearly 30-year rule. The protesters were demanding the agency be dismantled and it's leaders face a reckoning. Egypt's State Security Services (Muhabarat), which were given a free hand by emergency laws under Mohammed Hosni Mubarak to suppress dissent, are some of the most powerful symbols of this regime.

Many protest leaders say despite the fall of Hosni Mubarak and his government, the agency remains untouched in protecting the old regime and trying to sabotage the revolution. The agency believed the most pervasive security force in the Arab world, collecting intelligence on regime opponents and supporters a like. It was the planning brain behind everything during Mubarak's reign, he only trusted the State Security
The HCAF has replaced the head of the security, but it is not yet clear if it is considering restructuring it or redefining its mission as it charts Egypt's path toward a freer political system and eventual return to civilian rule. Some Egyptians say "it must be an agency-State security, not of regime-security". The crowds were still riding high on jubilation over the success in removing Hosni Mubarak after eighteen days of unprecedented popular protests, as the Egyptian public opinion immediately diverged sharply on whether Egypt's new military rulers bode well for the nation's democratic aspiration, they promised to maintain pressure on the military to carry-out through long-sought democratic reforms. The dissolution of the ruling-NDP is both just and logical for some reasons, the party was established by presidential decree in 1978, and hence the NDP was born as a ruling-party instead of becoming one through the ballot-boxes, the NDP as a ruling-party has obtained most of it's financial and physical resources from the state, is to say that financed by taxpayers indirectly, meaning disband the NDP and return it's assets to the people, not the ruler. The NDP, who has corrupted political life in Egypt for over three decades, enabled the ruling-president to maintain his grip on Egypt's legislative authority through rigged-elections. Former president Anwar El-Sadat's unilateral decision to establish the NDP in 1978 was the first step towards thwarting political pluralism in Egypt. The main opposition coalition, a loosely based grouping of the Egyptian youth and traditional opposition groups, said it would end its main protest in Cairo's Tahrir (liberation) square but would call for weekly demonstrations after Jumaa (Friday) prayers. The opposition coalition also called for an investigation into allegations of endemic corruption within the regime and the trial of officials responsible for the deaths of over 400 protesters.

The group also listed its demands for the first time in recent Egyptian history during a press conference. Those included are: the lifting of hated-emergency, laws: the forming of a presidential council and a broad-based unity government and creation of a new committee to amend or re-write the constitution. They called for reforms ensuring freedom of the press, freedom to form political parties and more transparent media institutions. Many are cautiously optimistic about the possibility of an indigenous democracy in Egypt. "Those who make peaceful change impossible, make a violent revolution inevitable", JFK. In latest development, Egypt's prosecutor-General announced detention of former president Mohammed Hosni Mubarak pending inquiries into accusations of corruption, abuse of authority and the killings of protesters during the uprising that ousted him from power. It said the on-going investigation
was into allegations assaults, killings and injury of protesters, squandering of public funds, and abuse of authority. The detention came hours after the 83 years-old former president was hospitalized with heart problems in the Red sea resort-town of Sharm El-Sheikh where he and his family have been living since his fall from power, he was banned from the travelling abroad and his assets have been frozen, many of his senior aides have already either been questioned or detained pending investigations, his two sons Gammal Mubarak and Alaa Mubarak were also detained for questioning and taken to the Torah prison on the outskirts of Cairo where a string of former top regime figures are already languishing in custody, facing similar investigations on corruption, former ruling-NDF party to be dissolved and it's assets to confiscate. Ex-president Hosni Mubarak Egypt's iron-fisted dictator of three decades, and his sons are expected to stand trial in an Egyptian court for human rights violations, murder, and plundering. The Egyptian Attorney-general announced that Hosni Mubarak with his sons would be tried on early August, 2011 on charges of "corruption, intentional murder of demonstrators during the 18-days popular uprising that ousted him, abuse of power to intentionally waste public-funds and unlawfully profiting from public-funds for themselves and others". Mr Essam Sharaf, who heads a caretaker administration and has limited powers under the military rulers begun his promised cabinet reshuffle as protests continue over the slow pace of political reforms. Among protester's demands are for corrupt officials who served under former president Hosni Mubarak to be tried.

The High Command of Armed Forces (HCAF) have meanwhile announced that they will restrict the use of military courts to try civilians. An estimated 850 protesters were killed during the revolt, many more were seriously injured by the police, and security plainclothes. The Egyptians have been calling for the investigation of their ruler of more than 30 years, along with that of many members of his government, tens of thousands protested once again in Cairo's central Tahrir (liberation) square demanding, the investigations are slow, they are outweighed by rights abuses by the new rulers, saying Hosni Mubarak and his family be put on trial, and many in the crowds accused the High military ruling command of protecting the former president. Egyptian fuming young revolutionaries, however, protested "we took him down in plain view of the whole world", along the way, more than 850 unarmed and peaceful protesters died, he must see his day in court of law, they demanded passionately. The ex-president has been in custody at a hospital in the Red Sea resort town of Sharm El-Sheikh since April, 2011, since his ouster, and now six months later, he was backed to a suburban Cairo
Police academy courtroom on a hospital bed as a defendant for murdering and plundering once again, his images and voices transmitted live into the courtroom to the international audience. "Yes, I am here, and I deny all the accusations, wholly!", rang-out the 83-years old ex-president speaking from one the Egypt's infamous "defendants cage" laying helplessly on a hospital bed, with a surprisingly deep and strong voice, paying a price for his misdeeds. Analysts say, "had he left office earlier, before killing protesters gratuitously, he would most probably not be where he is today, it's not really whether Hosni Mubarak is jailed, hospitalized or not at all, but rather the fact is that he has to answer for his previous actions is a hard lesson to future Egyptian leaders". As recent development, flames lit-up downtown Cairo, where massive Clashes raged in mid-September, drawing Copt-Christians angry over a recent church attack. At least 24 people were killed and more than 200 injured in the worst sectarian violence since the uprising that ousted president Mohammad Hosni Mubarak in February, 2011. The rioting lasted late into the night, bringing out a deployment of more than 1000 security forces and armored vehicles. On the 9th October, 2011, Egypt's ruling Military High Command Council has amended electoral rules to ban the use of religious slogans, a move the Islamic Brotherhood Freedom and Justice Party (IBFJP) said may prompt it to reconsider using it's traditional campaign phrase "Islam is the solution". The IBFJP was strictly banned under the ousted president Mohammed Hosni Mubarak but could ran candidates as "independents" who could be identified on electoral posters by the Islamist groups well-known slogan. Egyptians would start voting in a parliamentary election on the 28th November, 2011. Following are key dates and details on voting for the staggered lower and upper house votes that were announced by Egypt's election committee: On the 19th of November, 2011 deadly clashes once again have erupted in the Egyptian capital Cairo, according to the Ministry of health at least 38 deaths were confirmed in since as second round of uprising engulfed Cairo, and escalates to other cities like Alexandria and Suez as security forces continues their efforts to clear Cairo's Al-Tahrir (Liberation) square off-protesters. Protesters speak of their grievances and demands for the Mubarak regime to face trial on time. Protesters fear the Interim military HCAF government is trying to retain it's grip onto power ahead of parliamentary elections planned to commence by late 2011. The Egyptian High Command of the Armed Forces (HCAF) leaders promised to hasten transition to civilian rule. As of February 11, 2011, the position of President of Egypt is officially vacant following the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, led by Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, currently act in the
capacity as Head of State and Head of Government. There is an attempt to adopt a democratic system of government as to manage the need of the growing youthful population in Egypt.

What is the Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwan-Musleemin)?

The Muslim Brotherhood is a religious and political group founded on the belief that Islam is not simply a religion, but a way of life. It advocates a move away from secularism, and a return to the rules of the Quran as a basis for healthy families, communities, and states. The movement officially rejects the use of violent means to secure its goals. However, offshoots of the group have been linked to attacks in the past, and critics blame the Brotherhood for sparking troubles elsewhere in the Middle East. Many consider it the forerunner of modern militant Islamism.

When was IB created?

The Muslim Brotherhood has been part of the political scene in Egypt for more than 80 years. It was formed there by Hassan al-Banna in 1928. Teacher Al-Banna and his followers were initially united by a desire to oust the British from control in Egypt, and to rid their country of what they saw as "corrupting" Western influences.

What is its history?

In its early years, the group concentrated on religion, education and social services, but as its membership grew, it moved into the political sphere, organizing protests against the Egyptian government. In the 1940s, an armed wing of the Brotherhood was blamed for a string of violent acts, including the assassination of Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmoud Fahmi al-Nugrashi in 1948 -- shortly after he had ordered the dissolution of the MB. Al-Banna himself was assassinated soon afterwards -- his supporters claimed he had been killed on the wishes of the government. The movement went underground in the 1950s, and decades of oppression by successive Egyptian rulers led many of the Brotherhood's members to flee abroad, while others were jailed. The MB grew throughout the 1980s as part of a general growth of interest in Islam, and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 saw a spike in membership.

Why is it important in Egypt?

The Brotherhood is the oldest and largest opposition group in Egypt. It has widespread support among Egypt’s middle classes, and its members control many of the country’s professional organizations. Up until last
year, it was illegal under Egyptian law banning all parties based on religion. But in December, it dominated parliamentary elections, winning about half of the seats up for grabs.

How influential is the Islamic Brotherhood (IB) elsewhere?

There are branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in countries across the Middle East and North and East Africa, including Sudan, Syria and Saudi Arabia. There is also a branch in the U.S. Its offshoots outside Egypt are markedly more conservative in their views: The Kuwaiti branch is said to oppose the right of women to vote. Sayyid Qutb, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, developed the doctrine of jihad, and the radical group Hamas is believed to be an offshoot of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood.

Elections for a new president are expected to be held in November, 2011:

Egyptian Election schedule - REGISTRATION:

October 12 to 18, 2011. The election committee will accept nominations for parliamentary candidates for both houses, who will submit their documents through branches of Egypt's appeals court.

LOWER HOUSE (MAJLIS AL-SHAAB - PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY 454 seats) VOTE:

November 28, 2011 - The first stage of the parliamentary election kicks off in nine provinces including Cairo, Port Said, Alexandria, and Assiut in the south. December 5, 2011 - Run-off votes where no candidate wins a clear a majority will be held. December 14, 2011 - The second round of election starts in nine other provinces, including Bei Suef, Ismailia, Suez and Sohag. December 21 - The run-off vote will be held. January 3, 2012 - The third and final stage of the vote for the lower house takes place in the last nine governorates left, including al-Gharbiya, the heart of Egypt's Nile Delta and where elections have traditionally been heated, North and South Sinai and others. January 10 - 2012 - The run-off vote will be held.

UPPER HOUSE (MAJLIS AL-SHOURA - ADVISORY COUNCIL 264 seats) VOTE:

January 29, 2012 - The start of the first stage of the vote for the upper house in the same provinces as the first round of the vote for the lower house. February 5, 2012 - The run-off vote will be held. February 14, 2012 - The second-stage of the upper house vote. The run-off vote will be
on February 21. March 4, 2012 - The third and final stage of the vote for the upper house. The run-off vote will be on March 11. And to finalize the presidential contest by June, 2012.

Preliminary results!

On the 28th of November, 2011 long lines at polls as Egypt holds landmark vote, shaking-off political apathy. Egyptians turned out in long lines at voting stations in their nation's first parliamentary elections since ex-president Mohammed Hosni Mubarak's ouster, a giant step toward what they hope will be a democracy after decades of dictatorship. An official read out results constituency by constituency, but most candidates did not achieve the 50% required to avoid a run-off, which will take place next week. Islamists are expected to dominate this first democratic poll in 60 years. The Muslim Brotherhood are expected to lead the field, but a more radical group may also do well. But leaks suggest the Muslim Brotherhood is the big winner, with its Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) predicted to take about 30% of the vote. The FJP is in a coalition with smaller parties, and overall that coalition is expected to receive about 40%. Another bloc containing the al-Nur party was predicted to take some 20% of the vote. Egypt's ultraconservative Islamist party said Friday it plans to push for a stricter religious code in Egypt after claiming surprisingly strong gains in this week's initial round of voting for parliament, the first elections since Hosni Mubarak's ouster. Egypt's election commission announced only a trickle of results Friday and said 62 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the highest turnout in Egypt's modern history, the head of High Electoral Commission, described it as "highest since the time of the pharaohs". Preliminary counts leaked by judges and individual political groups indicated that the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm took the largest share of votes. The Muslim Brotherhood and hardline Islamist political parties in the first round of parliamentary elections last week won more than 60 percent of the vote. It’s now abundantly clear, “Egypt is on the fast track to becoming a totalitarian Islamic state”, according to Middle East analysts. Following closely behind, was the ultraconservative Islamist Nour Party and a coalition of liberal parties called the Egyptian bloc, according to those unofficial counts. The more moderate and pragmatic Muslim Brotherhood, on the other hand, has been around since 1928 and has for decades been the largest and best organized opposition movement in Egypt, despite being officially outlawed until Mubarak's ouster. Seeking to broaden its political appeal, the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party has
described its election platform as civil but with an Islamic background, setting them up to be more rival than ally to the harder-line Islamists.

The voting for Egypt's lower house of parliament is staggered over three stages. This week's vote, held in nine provinces, will determine about 30 percent of the 498 seats in the People's Assembly. Two more rounds, ending in January, will cover Egypt's other 18 provinces. Three more rounds before March will elect the less powerful upper house. Islamist victory in Egypt - long considered a linchpin of regional stability — would be the clearest signal yet that parties and candidates connected to political Islam will emerge as the main beneficiaries of this year's Arab Spring uprisings. It's to be recalled that Tunisia and Morocco have both elected Islamist majorities to parliament, and while Libya has yet to announce dates for its first elections, Islamist groups have emerged as a strong force there since rebels overthrew Muammar Al-Quadhafi in August.

Meanwhile, new interim Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, who was recently appointed by the military, formed a temporary Cabinet of 32 ministers, including 10 from the previous government. El-Ganzouri also served as a prime minister under Hosni Mubarak in the mid-1990s. Protesters had demanded a new premier in response to a security crackdown on demonstrations before the elections that killed more than 40 people. Also Friday, more than 5,000 protesters demonstrated in Cairo's Tahrir Square to call for a speedier transition to civilian rule and trials for security officers accused of killing protesters. Large crowds marched into the square carrying dozens of coffins wrapped in Egyptian flags to represent those killed in clashes with the police near the square in the week before the elections. Egypt's new parliament, in theory, is tasked with selecting a 100-member panel to draft Egypt's new constitution.

Election outcome:

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strong force there since rebels overthrew Muammar Al-Quadhafi in August.

The final results in Egypt's first post-Hosni Mubarak parliamentary elections confirm an overwhelming victory for Islamist parties. The Muslim Brotherhood (Akhwan-Muslimeen) Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) won the latest number 47% of the parliamentary seats under Egypt's complex electoral system. The hardline Salafist Nur Party came second. Muslim Brotherhood (Akhwan-Muslimeen) said, "Sharia Law" ensures personal freedoms, and said the elections "made Egyptians proud" adding that the results of elections are a "victory" for the democratic alliance led by Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), which includes a number of other parties. Egyptians were voted in three phases over a six-week period to elect the 498-members of the Peoples Assembly (Majlis Al-Shura). 10 further members would be appointed by the ruling High Command of the Armed Forces (HCAF). Egypt: Sons Gamal and Alaa are also standing trial in Egypt for complicity in the killing of protesters during the country's popular revolution. Ex-President Hosni Mubarak himself is charged with ordering the army of killing protesters during the uprising. Prosecutors at the trial of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak have demanded the death penalty for him. Mr. Hosni Mubarak is being tried in Cairo on charges of ordering the killing of demonstrators during unrest which led to his overthrow last year. The demand also applies to former Interior Minister Habib el-Adly and six other former security chiefs. More than 800 protesters were killed during an 18-day revolt before Mr Mubarak was ousted on 11 February. "Any fair judge must issue a death sentence for these defendants," prosecutor Mustafa Khater said, according to the AFP. "He [Mubarak] can never, as the head of the state, claim that he did not know what was going on," chief prosecutor Mustafa Suleiman told the court.

Side note: Egypt Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwan-Muslimeen) seeks presidential poll allies. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has called for talks to "save" the uprising ahead of a presidential election run-off. The Islamic Brotherhood says its candidate, Mohammed Mursi, won most votes in this week's first round, with some 25% of the vote. Partial figures suggest he will face Ahmed Shafiq, ex-President Mubarak's last prime minister in a second round next month. A spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood said Egypt would be "in danger" if Mr. Ahmed Shafiq wins, and the group would reach out to other candidates to defeat him. Mr. Mursi has already invited other presidential candidates and party leaders to hold talks, reports say. Early counts in the country's first free presidential elections
put Mr. Ahmed Shafiq at roughly 24%. The nationalist Hamdin Sabbahi, a fiery opponent of the Mubarak regime who became the choice of many of those supporting the revolution, appears to be in third place. More than 11,000 out of 13,000 polling stations have declared results. However, partial results are subject to recounts and final results are due on late May. No candidate appears close to reaching the 50% threshold necessary for an outright victory. Egyptians will choose between the Muslim Brotherhood and a candidate from the Mubarak-era regime when the presidential election goes to a run-off on 16 to 17 June, state media confirm. The Islamic Brotherhood candidate, Mohammed Mursi, has a slight lead on former PM Ahmed Shafiq, with a reported 25.3% of votes against 24.9%. The two represent forces that have battled each other for decades.

Side note: Egypt state of emergency lifted after 31 years. Egypt's state of emergency, that gave security forces sweeping powers to detain suspects and try them in special courts, has ended after 31 years. It has been in place without interruption since the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in October, 1981. Lifting the law was a key demand of activists in last year's uprising against President Hosni Mubarak. Egypt's military rulers, who took charge after the ousting of Mr Mubarak, indicated they would not renew the law. Some Egyptians had feared the country - preparing for a presidential election run-off - would be left in a power vacuum without the law, which expired at midnight on Thursday. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf) issued a statement to reassure the country that it will "continue to carry its national responsibility in protecting the country until the transfer of power is over". "This is huge," said Hossam Bahgat, a human rights activist who had long campaigned to lift the law. "What is really crucial is the message. The security forces operated under a culture that told them they were constantly above the law. Now they need to abide by the existing legislation and they won't enjoy any extra-legal powers." US State Department spokesman Mark Toner described the lifting of the emergency law as "a step in the direction" towards democratic transition. The emergency law was a key feature of the rule of President Mubarak, who repeatedly broke promises to lift it. At one point, human rights groups estimated there were more than 10,000 people in detention - many of them disappearing in Egyptian prisons. In January the head of Scaf, Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, partially eased the law except in the cases of "thuggery", without explaining exactly what that meant. The interior ministry is currently dealing with at least 188 people under the law, according to Human Rights Watch. However, there are some who believe
the state of emergency should have been renewed. Egypt is preparing for a run-off vote in the presidential elections which will be held on 16 to 17 June, 2012.

Side note: An Egyptian court has sentenced ex-President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak to life in prison for complicity in the killing of protesters during last year's uprising. Egypt's ex-President was sentenced to life in prison on the 2nd June, 2012 for his role in the killing of protesters during last year's revolution that forced him resign from power, a verdict that caps a stunning fall from grace for a man who ruled the country as his personal fiefdom for nearly three decades. The harsh sentence against the 84-year-old former leader appeared aimed at defusing tensions ahead of a divisive runoff presidential race that pits Mubarak's last prime minister against the Muslim Brotherhood’s candidate. Mubarak, the first Arab leader to be tried in his own country, remained silent inside court cage while his once-powerful sons appeared nervous and had dark circles under their eyes. His elder son Alaa whispered verses from the Quran. The 84-year-old Mubarak was then ferried in a helicopter away from the police academy that was used by the court in Cairo. Scuffles between Mubarak supporters and opponents broke out inside and outside the courtroom after the verdict was read, reflecting the deep polarization of the country since Mubarak was overthrown on Feb. 11, 2011. The former leader to be tried in person since the start of the Arab Spring in early 2011. Ex-Minister of Interior Habib Al-Adly also got a life sentence, but the acquittal of four high-ranking interior ministry officials sparked fury. Huge crowds of protesters have gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Demonstrations have also been reported elsewhere. Mubarak and his two sons were also acquitted on separate charges of corruption. But as Mubarak was being transferred to prison, he suffered a "health crisis", Egyptian state TV reported.

Side note: Thousands of Egyptians are continuing to protest against the verdicts in the trial of ex-President Hosni Mubarak. Two runners-up in the presidential election first round joined the demonstration in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Mr Mubarak and his interior minister, Habib al-Adly, were sentenced to life in prison for not stopping the killing of protesters in last year's uprising. But six security chiefs were acquitted. Mr Mubarak and his two sons were also cleared of separate corruption charges. Thousands of protesters are staying in Tahrir Square overnight, urging a renewal of the revolution that toppled Mr Mubarak last year. "We are now at a crossroad. It's either the revolution or back to the Mubarak regime," Abdellah Mahmoud, one of the demonstrators, was quoted as saying by the
Associated Press. Huge crowds took to the streets on Saturday and Sunday to express their outrage that no-one had been found guilty of ordering police to open fire in January and February 2011, in attacks which left more than 850 people dead. Many people were also angry that Mr Mubarak did not receive the death penalty, as the prosecution had demanded. The 84-year-old and his sons were acquitted of corruption under the statute of limitations. The prosecutor-general has said he will appeal against all the verdicts, but the process is expected to take several weeks. Mr Mubarak's defense team has also said it will appeal. "We reject the trial. It's a big farce," Hisham Khalifa, one of the protesters in Tahrir Square on Tuesday, told the AFP news agency. The demonstration was called by youth groups who led the uprising, including the Coalition of Revolution Youth and the Maspero Youth Union. It was also backed by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Side note: Egyptian presidential hopeful former Air Marshal Ahmed Shafiq, a former PM under jailed ex-leader Hosni Mubarak, has accused his Islamist rival of harassing Christians. Mr. Shafiq, who was speaking as protests continued in Cairo over the outcome of Mubarak's trial, said the Muslim Brotherhood aimed to create a "sectarian" state. About 1,000 anti-Mubarak activists remain in Cairo's Tahrir Square, angry that he and his two sons were acquitted of corruption and six former police chiefs also escaped punishment. Mubarak himself was sentenced to life in prison after being found guilty of complicity in the killing of protesters during last year's Arab Spring uprising. But many activists were disappointed that the court did not sentence the former president to death. Mr Shafiq faces an election run-off against the candidate of the socially conservative Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Mursi, on 16-17 June. Mr. Ahmed Shafiq was Mubarak's last prime minister and a former Airforce commander.

On 16 and 17 June, 2012 - Egyptians go to the polls in a run-off election to decide who will be their first freely-elected president. Thirteen candidates contested the first round on 23 and 24 May, with none winning more than half of the votes in order to guarantee victory. Votes are being counted after a second and final day of elections for the country's first president since Hosni Mubarak was forced from office in 2011. Islamist Mohammed Mursi is up against former Mubarak Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq in a second-round run-off. The vote also comes amid a bitter row over the dissolution of parliament following a court ruling on Thursday. Mr. Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood has denounced the step as unlawful and a coup against democracy. The movement urged Egyptians to protect their revolution after the ruling High Council of Armed Forces (HCAF) declared
the parliament null and void on Saturday. Two days earlier, the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that last year’s legislative polls were unconstitutional, in a decision made by judges appointed under Mr Mubarak. The dispute has laid bare the fears of some that the military council is trying to consolidate power and resist the democratic changes demanded during last year's demonstrations. Soldiers have already been stationed around the parliament with orders not to let MPs enter. Pro-revolutionary groups meanwhile say they will stage a protest in Cairo's Tahrir Square on Sunday night to keep up the pressure for reforms.

Meantime, tens of thousands have gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square to protest against a decision by the ruling military council to assume new powers. The protests were called by the Muslim Brotherhood, as it claims its candidate won last weekend's presidential poll. His rival, former PM Ahmed Shafiq, also says he has won. Meanwhile, officials said ex-President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, ousted in last year's revolution, had been moved from jail to a military hospital after a stroke. As Egyptians voted, the generals dissolved parliament and claimed all legislative power for themselves. Correspondents say the High Council of the Armed Forces (HCAF) appears to be working on the assumption that Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwan-Muslimeen) Mohammed Mursi will win, and making moves designed to reduce or constrain the power of the president to entrench it’s own. Activists have described the moves as a "military coup". Demonstrators have been chanting slogans against the military council, in the same square where huge protests last year led to the fall of President Hosni Mubarak.

Side note: Islamic Brotherhood (IB) known locally as “Ahwan-Muslimeen” candidate Mohammed Mursi was declared Egypt's first Islamist president after the freest elections in the country's history, narrowly defeating Hosni Mubarak’s last Prime Minister Ahmed Al-Shafiq in a race that raised political tensions in Egypt to a fever pitch. The country's last four presidents over the past six decades have all came from the ranks of the military. This is the first time modern Egypt will be headed by an Islamist and by a freely elected civilian. Throngs of Mursi supporters in Cairo's Tahrir Square erupted in cheers and dancing when the result was read out on live television. Some released doves with his pictures over the square where the uprising that ousted Hosni Mubarak last year was born. Others set off fireworks. Mursi’s spokesman Ahmed Abdel-Attie said words cannot describe the "joy" in this "historic moment." "We got to this moment because of the blood of the martyrs of the revolution," he said. "Egypt will start a new phase in its history." The announcement was the culmination of a tumultuous, 16-month transition that was supposed to bring
democratic rule, but was tightly controlled and curtailed by the military rulers who took power from Hosni Mubarak in February, 2011. Mr. Mohammed Mursi has been sworn in as Egypt's first civilian, democratically elected president at a historic ceremony in Cairo. Hours after the ceremony, he was saluted by Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, leader of the military council which is handing over power. Mr. Mursi has promised to restore the parliament dissolved by the military. In a speech at Cairo University, the Muslim Brotherhood politician said the army must respect the people's will. He will have to sort out a very difficult relationship with an entrenched military, regional analyst Magdi Abdelhadi says. The regime of former President Hosni Mubarak is still largely intact and many in it will not work with the new president, he adds. Overthrown in February, 2012, after mass pro-democracy demonstrations, Mubarak was sentenced to life imprisonment at the beginning of this month for failing to prevent the killing of protesters by the security forces. Egypt, the biggest Arab nation, is a key US ally in the region, as well as one of the few states in the Arab world to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel. Parliament was dissolved by Field Marshal Tantawi's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf), which assumed legislative powers under a controversial "interim constitutional declaration". But on Saturday Scaf handed over power to Mr Mursi after a military parade at the Hykestep military base on the outskirts of Cairo.

"We have fulfilled our promise which we made before God and the people," Field Marshal Tantawi said at the hand-over ceremony. "We now have an elected president, who assumed Egypt's rule through a free and direct vote reflecting the will of Egyptians." The field marshal, who saluted Mr. Mohammed Mursi and shook hands with him several times, decorated the new president with the Shield of the Armed Forces, the country's highest honor. In his speech earlier at Cairo University, Mr. Mursi said: "The army is now returning to its original role, protecting the nation and its borders." Parliament, the new president insisted in his speech, had been elected in a free and fair ballot and had been entrusted with drafting a new, democratic constitution. He hailed those killed in the uprising against President Mubarak. Families of some of the dead were in the hall and they held up photos of their sons and daughters. He vowed to raise Egypt to the rank of a modern state "where the president is the servant of his people". Mr. Mohammed Mursi was sworn in at the supreme constitutional court. The Egyptian people, he said, had "laid the foundations for a new life, for full freedom, a genuine democracy, for putting the meaning and significance of the constitution and stability above everything else". His government would be based on the
democratic pillars of "the constitutional court, the Egyptian judiciary, and the executive and legislative powers". The oath of office had originally been scheduled to take place at the parliament, which is dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood-backed Freedom and Justice Party and other Islamists. Mr Mursi said he was determined that the constitutional court, which had declared November's parliamentary election to be flawed, would remain "independent, strong, effective away from any suspicion and abuse". At Friday prayer, Mr. Mursi performed prayers at Cairo's Al-Azhar Mosque, one of the most prominent seats of learning in Sunni-Islam. He has sought to allay fears among some secular and Coptic Christian Egyptians that he will use his presidency to impose Islamic law. Mr Mursi's campaign has said he plans to appoint a woman and a Coptic Christian as his vice-presidents. In his speech at Cairo University, he said all Egyptians would be equal before the law.

Side note: Egyptian President designate Mohammed Mursi's order to reconvene parliament has been rejected by the country's highest court, which says its ruling dissolving the assembly is binding. Following President Mursi's decree, the speaker of the dissolved house had called for MPs to convene. Army units outside parliament were withdrawn, allowing MPs to enter. Mr. Mursi, whose Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwan Muslimeen) won most seats, says the chamber should function until a new election is held. But Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court, meeting, said that all its rulings and decisions were "final and not subject to appeal". The High Council of the Armed Forces (HCAF) - whose original decision to dissolve parliament was backed by the court - met in an emergency session shortly after the presidential decree was issued. The new president's order was widely seen as a challenge to the judiciary as well as the military. Parliament speaker Saad Al-Katatni said MPs should return for a session of parliament the said time, the official MENA news agency said. Despite the apparent tensions, President Mursi and Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, who heads HCAF, appeared together at a military cadet graduation ceremony. The military had enforced a court order last month dissolving parliament because party members had contested seats reserved for independents. The HCAF took over the reins of power last year, after the revolution that ended former President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule. The army move was initially welcomed by many of the anti-government protesters, but its presence became increasingly unpopular as critics accused its leaders of wanting to hold on to power. Mr. Mohammed Mursi, the IB candidate won the country's first free presidential election last month, and army chiefs formally handed over power on 30th June, 2012. But before his inauguration, the military granted itself sweeping
powers. The commanders' constitutional declaration stripped the president of any authority over the military, gave military chiefs legislative powers, and the power to veto the new constitution, which has yet to be drafted. In his presidential decree, Mr. Mursi said new parliamentary elections would be held 60 days after the constitution had been agreed by referendum. The Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwan Muslmeen) has consistently opposed the decision to dissolve parliament.

Side note: Former Egyptian presidential candidate Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh says the ruling military junta's addendum to the constitution is equivalent to a coup against the revolution. The statement follows the issuance of a new constitutional declaration by Egypt's ruling High Council of Armed Forces (HCAF), allowing it to reassume control over legislation and state budget after the country's constitutional court dissolved the elected parliament. Another amendment was also made which will see the new president being sworn in before the Supreme Constitutional Court instead of the lower house of parliament. Following the release of unofficial results showing Mohammed Mursi as the winner of the Egyptian presidential election in June, supporters have gathered in Cairo's Liberation Square to celebrate the Muslim Brotherhood candidate's victory. But, ominously, the Egyptian military delayed announcing the winner of the first presidential vote since last year's revolution. According to reports, the junta has made a deal with the US to complete a planned coup by bringing former premier Ahmed Al-Shafiq to power.

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Side note: Egypt in post-election political crisis: President Mohammed Mursi seeks talks on parliament row. Egypt's president has said he wants talks with other institutions to resolve a constitutional crisis over his attempts to reinstate parliament. Mr. Mohammed Mursi sparked a row with judges and the military at the weekend by issuing a decree reinstating the lower house of parliament. The chamber was dominated by Mr. Mursi’s Islamist allies, and was shut down by the military before he took power. Analysts say the dispute threatens to throw Egypt into political chaos. The Supreme Constitutional Court had initially ruled that some of the seats in parliament's lower house were unconstitutional because election rules had been breached. The military then dissolved the
whole chamber. But it was unclear whether the military had the authority to shut the parliament. Mr. Mursi reignited the row when he ordered parliament to reconvene, a decree that was later overruled by the court. In a statement, Mr. Mursi's office said the decision to reopen parliament was intended to fill a power vacuum. The statement said that the president was "committed to the rulings of Egyptian judges and very keen to manage state powers and prevent any confrontation". "There will be consultations among all political forces, institutions and the supreme council of judicial authorities to find the best way out of this situation in order to overcome this stage together," it added. Mr. Mursi, of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, was elected in June in the country's first ever freely contested leadership vote.

Side note: On 19th July, 2012 Egypt's ex-spy chief Omar Suleiman dies in United States. Omar Suleiman, who for years headed Egyptian intelligence under ousted President Hosni Mubarak, has died in the USA. He died in hospital in the early hours of Thursday, the official news agency Mena reported. General Suleiman, who was in his seventies, was appointed vice-president by Mubarak in the last days of his rule. He made a bid to stand for president in this year's election but was disqualified for technical reasons. Correspondents say he was seen as an enigmatic figure both inside and outside Egypt, and played a behind-the-scenes role in issues such as relations with the US and Israel. In a statement, Egypt's interim government paid tribute to Suleiman, calling him a "patriotic, honest figure". An assistant to Gen Suleiman said his death was unexpected. "He was fine. It came suddenly while he was having medical tests in Cleveland," Hussein Kamal told Reuters news agency, adding that preparations were under way to take the body home for burial. Reem MAMDouh, a member of Suleiman's presidential campaign team, told AFP that the general's health had been declining. "His health deteriorated recently. He was in the United States with his family," he said. State news agency Mena quoted a diplomat as saying he had been suffering from lung disease and had also developed heart problems. General Suleiman headed the Egyptian General Intelligence Services (Egis) for 18 years. He became the country's first vice-president in 30 years on 29 January 2011, four days after the popular uprising against Mubarak began. Two weeks later, he appeared on state television to announce the long-time president had stepped down, prompting celebrations in Cairo's Tahrir Square - the focus of Egypt's protest movement. After failing to win enough signatures to stand in Egypt's first post-Mubarak presidential vote earlier this year, he left the country, reportedly going to Abu Dhabi, then to Germany, then finally to the US for treatment. The BBC's Jon Leyne in Cairo says Omar
Suleiman was a key figure behind the presidency of Hosni Mubarak. As spy chief, Gen Suleiman helped enforce the police state that kept Mubarak in power, he says. He is believed to have indirectly saved Mubarak's life, advising him to take an armored car on a state visit to Ethiopia in May, 1995 - his convoy was ambushed by IB Islamist militants.

Side note: Mr. Mohammed Mursi, Egypt’s newly-elected president, has asked the irrigation minister, Hisham Kandil, to form a new government. This a surprising nomination but one with some importance to Ethiopia as Hisham Kandil was the chief representative of Egypt in the recent talks on water rights in the Nile River basin. This bears watching, as the Blue Nile situation continues to develop in the future, according hydrologists.

Side note: Former Egyptian spy chief Suleiman laid to rest in Cairo. The funeral for Omar Suleiman, Egypt's former spy chief, took place amid tight security Saturday, attended by several thousand mourners, politicians, religious scholars and military leaders. Suleiman succumbed Thursday to complications from amyloidosis, a disease that affects multiple organs, including the heart and kidneys, according to the Cleveland Clinic in the United States, where the 76-year-old died. Suleiman's body, flown by private jet from the United States, arrived at the VIP terminal in the Cairo Airport at dawn Saturday. Several dozen supporters wearing black T-shirts waited outside the terminal carrying the Egyptian flag. They chanted slogans denouncing Israel and the United States. The ceremony coincided with the second day of Ramadan. The military funeral began with prayers at the Al Rashadan mosque in Nasr City in eastern Cairo. Suleiman's coffin, wrapped in the Egyptian flag, was borne on a horse-drawn carriage through the streets, accompanied by a marching band to the Madinet Nasr Cemetery. Military police wearing red berets carried his coffin past screaming mourners carrying posters of Suleiman and chanting denouncements of the newly elected president, Mohamed Morsy, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Morsy spent six months behind bars during Suleiman's tenure as head of intelligence. Morsy delegated his grand chamberlain and Brig. Gen. Abdul-Monem Foda as his representatives. Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa and a delegation from Al-Azhar, Egypt's highest Islamic institution, also were present, as were Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, head of the High Council of the Armed Forces (HCAF), and his chief of staff, Sami Anan. Suleiman was briefly appointed vice president under President Hosni Mubarak during the uprising that toppled the longtime Egyptian leader last year. It was Suleiman who, in February 2011, announced Mubarak's resignation and declared that SCAF would run the country's affairs. Suleiman's death came as a surprise to Egyptians.
He had entered the race for Egypt's first democratically elected president in the eleventh hour, but failed to gather enough signatures to be on the ballot. He was disqualified by a panel that included members connected with the Mubarak regime, suggesting the move was not politically motivated. Suleiman had headed Egypt's intelligence since 1993, maintained close ties with the CIA, and was often criticized by human rights groups for his heavy-handed approach with suspected militants. Born into poverty in the town of Qena, he enrolled in Egypt's prestigious military academy and was decorated for his performance in the wars against Israel in 1967 and 1973. In June 1995, both Suleiman and Mubarak survived an assassination attempt during an African summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Suleiman was credited for saving Mubarak's life that day. A divisive figure in Mubarak's regime, during the revolution Suleiman led negotiations with various pro-change groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood. His stance was mainly to end the "Million Man" protest in Tahrir Square and create a "reform" package or else face a military coup. When asked by a CNN correspondent what he wanted from the protesters during the 18-day uprising that toppled Mubarak, he replied, "Go home." In an interview with a Western news channel last year, Suleiman remarked, "Egyptians are not ready for democracy."

Side note: Egypt's president tapped a young, little-known water minister to form a new government. At 49, Hesham Kandil becomes the youngest prime minister in Egypt's history. "My government in the first place will be a government of technocrats," he told Egypt's state news agency after meeting with President Mohamed Mursy. Kandil said that he will focus on implementing Mursy's program. Educated in the United States -- he earned master's and doctoral degrees at the University of North Carolina -- Kandil joined Egypt's government after the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in February, 2011. Three weeks after Mubarak fell, Kandil was appointed minister of irrigation and water resources under Prime Minister Essam Sharaf. Before that, he had been a water specialist with the African Development Bank and participated in the Nile Basin Initiative, according to his biography. Mursy's appointment may disappoint business leaders who had hoped for someone with financial expertise to lead Egypt and its fragile economy. Other critics say he lacks the political experience needed for the job. In last month's presidential election runoff, Mursy, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, edged out Ahmed Shafiq -- Mubarak's last prime minister - winning nearly 52% of the votes. Mursy resigned from the Muslim Brotherhood and its Freedom and Justice Party shortly after the results were announced in an apparent effort to send a message that he will represent all Egyptians. He was sworn into office on June 30, but the
powerful High Council of the Armed Forces (HCAF) wields legislative power, having ordered the dissolution of parliament after the country's highest court ruled that it had been elected under invalid laws. Mursy tried to call it back into session, but the court reaffirmed its decision, so the military council retains lawmaking powers until a new parliament is sworn in near the end of the year.

Side note: New Egyptian Cabinet Sworn In by President Mohammed Mursi

Egypt's new cabinet has been sworn in by newly-elected President Mohammed Mursi at a ceremony in Cairo. The ministers were selected by Prime Minister-designate Hisham Qandil, who earlier called for Egyptians to rally behind "a people's government." Only four ministers from President Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood were given posts. Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, who ruled Egypt after Hosni Mubarak stepped down, remains as defense minister. The military retains broad powers, including legislative authority. President Mursi has been criticized for the time he has taken to name a prime minister and form a government. He promised an inclusive government, with women and Christians represented. The cabinet line-up includes only two women - one of them is a Christian. His nomination of Mr Qandil, the outgoing water resources minister, surprised many observers, who had been expecting a well-known figure. 'We are all Egyptians' Speaking at a news conference in Cairo ahead of the ceremony, Mr Qandil appealed for Egyptians to pull together to support the new government. "I call on all Egyptians to rally behind our elected president and to work with the government to achieve all of our goals. "We have to stop asking who is a Copt, a Muslim or a Salafi. I don't see that. All I see is that we are all Egyptians and this should be the main principle." Mr Qandil will hold a meeting with members of his government on Saturday to discuss the next steps on seeking an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan, he said, according to the Reuters news agency. Seven ministers will remain from the outgoing military-appointed cabinet - including Mumtaz al-Said, who will serve as finance minister, and Mohammed Kamal Amr, who stays on as foreign minister. Former prime minister Kamal Ganzouri becomes a presidential adviser. The re-appointment of Field Marshal Tantawi, head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf), is in line with an interim constitutional declaration issued after June's presidential election run-off. The Scaf assumed presidential powers after Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down as president in February 2011. Its declaration and decision to dissolve parliament only days before caused outrage and overshadowed the nominal transfer of power to President Mursi on 30 June. Of the ministers appointed, only four are members of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), which Mr Mursi
used to lead. They were given posts in higher education, housing, youth and information - the ministry which regulates the media. Another key post, the minister of religious endowments (Awqaf), went to Osama al-Abd, the president of al-Azhar University. There had been speculation that an ultraconservative Salafist cleric, Mohammed Yusri Ibrahim, would be appointed. Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi was formally sworn in by President Mohammed Mursi. Meantime, Coptic-Muslim clashes erupt in Egypt. At least 16 people have been wounded after Muslims attacked a church and Christian homes in a village near the Egyptian capital, Cairo, officials say. The unrest in Dahshur, about 40km (25 miles) south of Cairo, started after a Muslim man died of wounds sustained in an earlier clash on Friday. Violence frequently flares between Egypt's Muslim majority and its Coptic Christian minority. It is the first instance since Mohammed Mursi took over as president in June. Last October, a suicide attack on a church in Alexandria killed 24 people. Police in Dahshur early on Wednesday fired teargas to stop a Muslim mob from setting fire to a church, but the rioters instead torched several Christian properties and three police cars, officials said. Ten policemen were among the 16 injured, according to the authorities. The office of the local Coptic archbishop of Giza said the entire Christian population of Dahshur had now fled, according to the Associated Press. The rioters "looted and torched shops, including a jewelry shop... and terrorized the local community, forcing them to leave their homes", the agency quoted the statement as saying. Tension first erupted on Friday after a Christian laundry worker was accused by a Muslim client of singeing his shirt while ironing it. Villagers from both sides threw fire-bombs at each other, fatally wounding a Muslim. The man died of his injuries on Tuesday and was buried overnight, sparking the latest unrest. About 10% of Egyptians are Coptic Christians. They fear that more radical forms of Islam, resurgent since the fall of former President Hosni Mubarak, could imperil their safety in Egypt.

Side note: Sinai Problem Resurfaces for Egypt' According to Frank Gardner, the BBC security correspondent, the violence in the far north of the Sinai Peninsula is an uncomfortable reminder of the security concerns that persist there, decades after Egypt and Israel signed the Camp David peace treaty. This barren, partly mountainous triangle wedged between Africa and Asia has always been harder to police than the heavily populated Nile Valley and Delta of mainland Egypt. Amongst its estimated 400,000 inhabitants the scattered tribes that live in the Sinai are Bedouin (or "Badu", Arabic for desert dwellers), ethnically different from mainland Egyptians. Many of them feel marginalized from the government's programs of investment and economic development applied to the
mainland. They see the massive development of tourist infrastructure along the Gulf of Aqaba coast in resorts like Sharm-El-Sheikh, Dahab and Nuwaiba but complain of little benefit to them. The once deserted coastline where tribes like the Bani M’zaina grazed their sheep, goats and camels has effectively been colonized since the 1980s by Cairenes, Alexandrines and other mainland Egyptians, employed in an industry that has seen millions of package tourists jetting in on direct flights from Europe. So instead, some of the Bedouin have turned their talents to an ancient skill: smuggling. Whether it is drugs, guns, explosives or cigarettes, no-one knows the hidden wadis and mountain passes of south Sinai like they do, nor the undulating dunes of north Sinai that border the Gaza Strip and Israel. For the Egyptian security forces sent to police these remote outposts this is almost a punishment posting, a banishment to an alien land where they can quickly lose their way beyond the gates of their bases. When it comes to security in the Sinai there are a number of overlapping factors which help explain why the area remains a problem today for both Egypt and Israel. In November 1982, Israel handed over the final tranche of eastern Sinai that it had captured from Egypt during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. As a student at the time I watched the Egyptian Army move in as the Israelis left behind abandoned trenches, security wells for disposing of suspicious objects and tourist signs in Hebrew. The sleepy, one-hotel resort that Israelis called Ofira grew into the mega development that Sharm El Sheikh is today. Under the terms of the Camp David peace treaty of 1979 two bases were also set up, in north and south Sinai, to house mostly US troops from the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) whose job was primarily to stop Egyptian and Israeli forces from clashing. But neither the presence of those peacekeepers nor the spectacular success of Sharm El Sheikh as a resort has kept the Sinai out of trouble. In 2005 over 80 people were killed in bomb attacks in Sharm, something which the governor of South Sinai assured me the following year could never happen again after improvements to security. But in the north there have been countless attacks in the past two years on the gas pipelines running between Egypt and Israel. The perpetrators are believed to be a mix of those who do not approve of the cold peace between the two countries and local Bedouin with a grudge against their government. Secret subterranean tunnels have long been burrowed beneath the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, a key smuggling route for Palestinians unable to leave their territory. But after Sunday’s attack by militants on an Egyptian border port, Egypt's military now says it is determined to close the tunnels down. Whatever takes place along the borders of the Gaza Strip, smuggling through the Sinai is not about to
stop. With the Gulf of Suez on one side and the Gulf of Aqaba on the other, the business is simply too lucrative for too many people, some quite possibly in official positions. With smuggling come other forms of crime and wherever it exists there will always be a potential security vacuum, especially when economic opportunities are so limited for local inhabitants. I have known Bedouin tribesmen, masters of courtesy and hospitality when I have stayed with them, to boast proudly of arms caches hidden in desert valleys they say "the police will never find in a thousand years". With their proximity to Israel, the sparsely governed deserts of the Sinai Peninsula are a tempting location for jihadists stung by criticisms that al-Qaeda has largely failed to score an attack on Israel. Some may well look wistfully at the map and decide this could join southern Yemen and Pakistan’s tribal territories as a convenient rear base in which to train, arm and plan attacks. The tourist resorts along the coast, with their scantily clad Russians, Scandinavians and other European holidaymakers were previously seen as a "soft target" for jihadists, although their attacks of 2005-2006 killed more Egyptian Muslims than foreigners. Since then, though, there is no question that security around the resorts has improved dramatically. The domestic backlash in Egypt this week over the killing by militants of Egyptian border guards on Sunday has clearly goaded the Cairo government into a firm response while possibly making it harder for jihadists to find local support in the Sinai. On Wednesday Egypt's military read out a statement on national television that was both a direct appeal and something of an admission of its own shortcomings: "We call on the tribes and residents of Sinai to cooperate," it said, "to regain security control of Sinai".

Sinai Peninsula At A Glance’

Huge desert peninsula of about 60,000 sq km (23,000 sq miles) with a population of only a few hundred thousand Distinct identity from rest of Egypt: populated by native Bedouin and a substantial minority of Palestinian extraction.

Of great strategic importance, linking Egypt to the Middle East, and site of Egyptian border with Israel and only non-Israeli border with Gaza.

Under Israeli occupation from 1967 to 1982, it remains under special security regime mandated by 1979 peace treaty, which significantly restricts Egypt’s freedom of military action and requires deployment of multinational peacekeeping forces.
There has been a surge in jihadist activity in the past decade, but analysts say discriminatory treatment by Cairo underpins local unrest.

Updates - Egypt's President Mohammed Mursi sacks officials after Sinai attacks' Egyptian President Mohammed Mursi has sacked the country's intelligence chief and the governor of the country's North Sinai province. Hours earlier, the Egyptian military launched an offensive in the region against suspected Islamist militants which it says has killed 20 people. The campaign comes after militants killed 16 Egyptian border guards in the area on Sunday. On Wednesday, more attacks followed on checkpoints in the town of al-Arish. Those attacks left a number of people wounded and the military offensive was launched hours later. The sacking of the country's intelligence chief was announced in a statement on state-run TV. "Gen Mohamed Murad Mowafi is given retirement starting from today," presidential spokesman Yasser Ali said. Gen Mowafi had been quoted in Egyptian media as saying that the intelligence services had received warning of Sunday's attack. However, he said they had only passed the matter on to the relevant authorities, saying that the intelligence services' job was only to collect information. Mr Mursi has appointed an acting intelligence chief, Gen Mohamed Raafat Abdel-Wahed. He also dismissed the commander of the presidential guard, as well as several other top security officials. Sunday's attack was the deadliest and most brazen against Egyptian troops in the Sinai region for decades, and Mr Mursi had faced criticism for not taking decisive action in response. Wednesday's military offensive in Sinai killed 20 people in the village of Touma, according to military officials, while the Sheikh Zuwaid area to the west was also hit. Military spokesmen said the initial operation had been a "success" and that it was ongoing. This is the first time Egypt has fired missiles in Sinai since the 1973 war with Israel, when it attempted to recapture the Sinai peninsula, security officials told Associated Press. Egyptian military presence in Sinai is limited and requires Israeli approval under the terms of the 1979 peace treaty between the nations which returned Sinai to Egyptian control. State news agency Mena said that during the air raids, hours after the al-Arish checkpoints were attacked, "terrorists" had used rockets and rocket-propelled grenades to try to shoot down the military aircraft "but they failed". Tensions are very high in the area, where Islamist extremists are said to have gained a foothold in recent months, taking advantage of the security vacuum left after former President Hosni Mubarak was ousted last year, reports the BBC's Yolande Knell in Sinai. The Egyptian soldiers killed in Sunday's attack were buried on Tuesday in a funeral marked by angry calls for vengeance. Some protesters chanted slogans against the Muslim Brotherhood, and according
to witnesses, tried to assault Prime Minister Hisham Qandil. Both Israeli and Egyptian officials blamed Sunday's attack on Islamist militants - though Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, the group to which President Mohammed Mursi belongs, accused the Israeli spy agency Mossad of being responsible. Israel rejected that claim as "non-sense". Egypt's military spokesman said the initial operation against militants in Sinai had been a "success". Egypt sends reinforcements as offensive builds. Egypt has deployed extra troops, tanks and other armored vehicles to the Sinai peninsula in an escalation of its military offensive in the area. The reinforcements follow the killing of 16 border guards by suspected Islamist militants on Sunday. The army has also begun sealing off tunnels into Gaza, according to Egypt's Mena news agency. Earlier reports that fresh fighting had broken out in al-Arish have been denied by a source quoted by the agency. According to Nile News TV, violent clashes had broken out between police and armed men outside a police station in the town. A heavy military presence is building up in al-Arish. Meantime, Egypt army 'kills gunmen in village raid' At least six suspected militant gunmen have been killed by the Egyptian army in the Sinai peninsula, officials say. They were killed during raids on hideouts in a village near al-Arish town in the north of the region, AP news agency reports. An offensive against Islamist militants in Sinai was launched last week after 16 border guards were killed. It was the most brazen attack against Egyptian troops in the Sinai region for years. Sunday's killings in al-Ghora village, some 30km (19 miles) south of al-Arish, are the first reported casualties among the suspected militants since the military operation began. A security source told the AFP news agency the suspected militants were armed with rocket launchers, grenades and automatic weapons. State television, which gave no details of the fighting, said three soldiers had also been killed. Analysts say that the security situation in the Sinai has deteriorated following the fall of Egypt's long-time President Hosni Mubarak last year, which Islamist extremists appear to have exploited. The area in Sinai where the borders of Egypt, Israel and Gaza meet has also become a hotbed of smuggling - through tunnels into Gaza. Bedouin leaders in the Sinai agreed to help the army in its offensive and they also backed plans to destroy the smuggling tunnels into Gaza.

Updates: Bedouin tribal leaders in Egypt's Sinai peninsula have agreed to help restore security in the lawless border area with the Gaza Strip and Israel. In talks with Interior Minister Ahmed Gamal al-Din, they also backed plans to destroy smuggling tunnels into Gaza. The move comes as Egyptian troops mass in the area in an operation to contain Islamist militants who have built up a presence there. The militants are suspected
of killing 16 Egyptian border guards. Egypt has deployed extra troops, tanks and other armored vehicles. It also closed the Rafah border with the Gaza Strip following the killings. The border - the only way in or out of the enclave without passing through Israel - was reopened, but only for Palestinians wishing to return to Gaza. Also military sources said six suspected militants had been arrested in the northern Sinai region. It was not immediately clear whether they were linked to the border attack. Egypt's state-run Nile TV put the number arrested at nine.

Updates: Egypt leader Mohammed Mursi orders army chief Tantawi to resign' Egyptian President Mohammed Mursi has ordered the retirement of the powerful head of the country's armed forces, Field Marshal Mohamad Hussein Tantawi, a presidential spokesman has said. He also said a constitutional declaration aimed at curbing presidential powers had been cancelled. Mr Mursi, who was elected in June, is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwan-Muslimeen). Relations between Islamists and the military have been increasingly tense since the fall of President Hosni Mubarak. "Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi has been transferred into retirement from today," presidential spokesman Yasser Ali said in a statement. He added that a career army officer, General Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, would replace Field Marshal Tantawi as both armed forces chief and defense minister. Field Marshal Tantawi, 76, has not yet indicated whether he accepts the moves. Chief of staff Sami Annan is also retiring, the spokesman announced. BBC’s Middle East correspondent Kevin Connolly says the dismissal of senior military officers will be seen by Egyptians as a decisive move in a struggle for real power between the country's newly elected politicians and the generals who have exercised power for many years. As head of the High Council of the Armed Forces (HCAF), Field Marshal Tantawi became Egypt's interim ruler after President Hosni Mubarak was ousted following mass protests in February of last year. Under the interim constitutional declaration issued by HCAF before Mr. Mohammed Mursi was sworn in, the president could not rule on matters related to the military - including appointing its leaders. HCAF also dissolved parliament, which is dominated by the president's Islamist allies. Tensions between the Egyptian presidency and the military have been exacerbated since Islamist militants in the Sinai peninsula killed 16 border guards in a raid earlier week. BBC’s correspondent says Mr. Mursi appears to be seizing on that failure - which shocked many Egyptians. The presidential spokesman said General Annan and Field Marshal Tantawi had been appointed as presidential advisers and were given Egypt's highest state honor, the Grand Collar of the Nile.
Updates: The head of Egypt's Higher Military Council, Mohammd Hussein Tantawi, has been replaced by the country's new President Mohammed Mursi, after 17 years in office. Field Marshal Mohammed Tantawi was Egypt's acting head of state after Hosni Mubarak resigned from the presidency last year amid mass street protests. Born in 1935, and of Nubian origin, Field Marshal Tantawi was far from a fresh face for the Egyptian leadership. He was a long-time trusted associate of Mr. Hosni Mubarak, and, like all Egyptian previous presidents since the 1952 revolution that overthrew the monarchy, Field Marshal Tantawi had a strong military background. He started out as an infantryman in 1956 and went on to study for a master's degree in military science. He served in the 1956 Suez Crisis and the 1967 and 1973 Middle East wars, all against Israel. In 1991, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, he was on the coalition side for the first Gulf War. He received Kuwait Liberation medals from Egypt, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. He served in the Egyptian government as minister of defense and military production for 21 years and became general commander for the armed forces in 1995. Field Marshal Tantawi was often discussed as a possible runner for the presidency. However, many thought that his age and reported ill health were barriers against him. He was also said to lack political ambition and support among the armed services' rank and file. A US diplomatic cable from March 2008 published by Wikileaks described Field Marshal Tantawi as "charming and courtly" but also "aged and change-resistant". "He and Mubarak are focused on regime stability and maintaining the status quo through the end of their time. They simply do not have the energy, inclination or world view to do anything differently," the cable read. While this called into question Field Marshal Tantawi's reformist credentials, the Higher Council of Armed Forces (HCAF) moved quickly to reassure Egypt's demonstrators that it would respect their "legitimate demands" following the fall of Mohammed Hosni Mubarak. In another communiqué, the council also said it would "remain committed to all its regional and international treaties," implicitly confirming the landmark 1979 peace treaty with Israel known as the “Camp-David Agreement” would stay intact - providing reassurances for Washington and Israel. The army was widely praised for allowing the massive protests to unfold and eventually for shepherding Mr. Hosni Mubarak out of power. It was seen as a unifying force on the streets, less brutal and corrupt than the interior ministry police (Mukhabarat) or pro-Mubarak gangs. It helped Field Marshal Tantawi enjoy a short honeymoon with his people. However, this later expired amid anger over the slow pace of democratic reforms in Egypt.
Meantime, Egypt President Mursi explains army chief replacement' The Egyptian President has said his move to order the retirement of two of the country's top generals was for "the benefit of this nation". He was speaking after replacing the powerful head of the armed forces, Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, and the chief of staff, Gen Sami Annn. Mr Mursi also issued a constitutional declaration giving him broad legislative and executive powers. The generals assumed presidential powers after the fall of Hosni Mubarak. Mr Mursi annulled a key constitutional declaration issued in June which gave the military legislative powers and budgetary controls as well as the right to oversee the process of drawing up a new permanent constitution. It is not clear how the Supreme Constitutional Court will react to Mr Mursi's move to nullify the decree. Meanwhile, the army has so far shown no sign of challenging the surprise replacement of Field Marshal Tantawi. State media quoted a military source as saying there was no "negative reaction" from within the armed forces. In Cairo, thousands of people gathered overnight in Tahrir Square, expressing their support for Mr Mursi's move.

Updates: The new President of Egypt is taking the concept of getting work done in the first 100 days in office very seriously. Mohammed Mursy forced out the long serving head of the military Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, his number two, and a handful of other generals. At the same time, Mursy nullified the constitutional declaration made by the military council before he took office June 30th. His message is clear. And while the military wanted to sustain its grip on power, Mursi was able to wrestle control after what was seen as a military lapse in the Sinai. Mursy is taking a bold stand, Ordering counter-attacks against militant hideouts over the weekend near al-Arish in Northern Sinai, after 16 border guards were killed in a surprise attacks when they were breaking fast at sundown during Ramadan. But the president is going down a tricky road. Mohammed Al-Issis, a political economist at the American University in Cairo, said Mursy's strategy is particularly difficult since it is "not clear who the enemy is. " Recent events, he said, provided an early indication of where the Sinai is headed. The attacks, and changes at the top in the military, have far reaching implications -- not the least of which is the attempted rebuilding of the Egyptian economy. Nearly a year and a half after the uprisings against the 30 year rule of Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, Egypt is struggling to find its footing. The Sinai may be vast, but scenes of attacks in the north have real potential to spook tourists who were just getting comfortable with coming back to Red Sea resorts in the south. Tourism is the number one foreign exchange earner in the country, but revenues dropped in 2011 to just under $9 billion, from $12.5 billion the
year before the uprisings. The southern Sinai, especially Sharm El-Sheikh, is the main foreign tourist destination. There is a genuine cash crunch, with foreign exchange reserves at roughly $14 billion - half the level of early 2011. Strategists say the cash will last only four months if revenues don't start coming in at a faster pace. The Egyptian government is still pegging growth during the current fiscal year at 3.5% to 4%, but economists who closely track the Middle East and North Africa region, known as MENA, are beginning to mark down expectations. Alia Moubayed, of Barclays, says the security challenge "not only puts the recovery in this particular region on negative outlook, but highlights the volatility of the challenges that this new government and president will face." Strategically, it was thought that Mursy and Tantawi could work together against a common enemy in the Sinai. This was expected to include Bedouin tribal leaders who also want to bring their territory under control. That plan moves ahead, but Tantawi and his team are not part of it. The new president wants to get this military challenge under control -- hence the strong and quick use of force -- so he can focus on the bigger picture, which remains hazy. The International Monetary Fund mission is still planning to visit Egypt this month to jump-start negotiations on a $3.2 billion loan program. Talks took place last spring but there was reluctance to push ahead with that program until a government was in place with a new plan of action. Knowing the importance of Egypt to the broader region, Gulf players with ample oil and gas revenues are stepping up funding. Qatar has said it would inject $2 billion into the Egyptian Central Bank, and Saudi Arabia earlier this year pledged a billion dollars. Candidate Mursy campaigned on delivering what he called a Renaissance Project for Egypt, an economic blueprint that engages wider swaths of society. One of the key criticisms of the Mubarak regime was that the reform program started too late in the middle of the last decade and then trickled down too slowly. London based Arabia Monitor, commenting after attacks in Sinai, said the new government "faces the difficult challenge of striking the right balance between propping up the economy, achieving fiscal consolidation, and improving the socio-economic conditions that helped overturn the old order." The budget deficit could top 9% this year, but most agree this is not the time for austerity. It is a time to wrest back control of the trouble spot on the volatile border with Israel and Gaza and get Egyptians back to work, and the economy growing again. CNN News Updates: Egypt president names Copt and woman among assistants' Egyptian leader Mohammed Mursi has appointed a Christian intellectual, a female university professor and two Islamists as presidential assistants. Samir Murqus, a liberal Coptic writer, was named assistant for democratic
transition, officials announced. Pakinam al-Sharkawi, who teaches political sciences at Cairo University, will be in charge of political affairs. During his election campaign Mr Mursi said he would appoint Copts among his advisers, possibly as vice-president. However, he named Mahmoud Mekki, a veteran judge who campaigned for judicial independence under Hosni Mubarak, as his deputy. Copts, who make up about 10% of Egypt's 82 million people, were also disappointed that the new cabinet includes only one Christian. The two other assistants appointed on Monday are members of the two Islamist parties which dominated parliament before it was dissolved in June after a court found the election law had been unconstitutional. Imad Abdul Ghafour, the head of the ultraconservative Salafist Nour party, is in charge of relations with civil society, while Issam al-Haddad of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, will look after external relations and international co-operation. Mr Mursi also named on Monday the first 17 members of his "presidential advisory team", with whom he will hold regular meetings. They include former presidential candidate Mohammed Salim al-Awwa, Muslim Brotherhood leader Essam al-Aryan, political expert Seif al-Din Abdul Fattah and writer Sekina Fouad. BBC News Africa

Updates: Egypt troops step up campaign against Sinai militants' Egyptian security forces have killed 11 militants since launching an offensive in the Sinai peninsula earlier this month, the defense ministry has said. The operation, launched after 16 border guards were killed in an attack on 5 August, has also led to the arrest of 23 suspects and seizures of weapons. Forces would be redeployed on Wednesday to "complete the hunt for terrorist elements", the ministry added. The build-up of troops and heavy weapons has caused concern in Israel. Since 1982, when Israeli troops withdrew, Sinai has remained under a special security regime mandated by the peace treaty the two countries signed in 1979, which restricts Egypt's freedom of military action. On Monday, Egyptian President Mohammed Mursi stressed that his country was committed to all international treaties and, without naming Israel, said no other states should worry about its actions in Sinai. "Egypt is practising its very normal role on its soil and does not threaten anyone and there should not be any kind of international or regional concerns at all from the presence of Egyptian security forces," he said. Checkpoints: Egypt launched "Operation Eagle", which has involved thousands of troops backed by tanks and heavy equipment, after the 16 border guards died in a raid on their base near the Rafah crossing with the Gaza Strip. After killing the soldiers, the militants crossed the border with Israel in an apparent attempt to carry out another attack. However, they were killed in Israeli
air strikes. No-one has said they were behind the attack, although suspicions have centered on jihadist groups which are known to operate in eastern Sinai. In the first few days of Operation Eagle, security forces carried out several raids on alleged militant hideouts, but none have been reported since. Troops also set up checkpoints on main roads and around the main towns of northern Sinai. Initially, some were targets of hit-and-run attacks. The campaign is being led by the Defense Minister and head of the armed forces, Gen Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, who was appointed by President Mursi in a shake-up of the military's leadership on 12 August. On Monday, the military's chief-of-staff promised local leaders that his troops will "not permit any criminal hideouts in the land of Sinai, and current measures taken ensure that no innocent will be harmed". Lt-Gen Sidqi Subhi also said they did not aim to "counter thoughts with weapons, but they raise arms in the face of those who carry arms". BBC News Africa: 29 August, 2012

Egypt's President Mohammed Mursi removes prosecutor general'

Egyptian President Mohammed Mursi has removed Prosecutor General Abdel Maguid Mahmoud from his post. He was appointed envoy to the Vatican, with Mr Mursi's office giving no official reason for the switch. But Mr Maguid later said he would stay in his post in defiance of Mr Mursi's order, state-run Mena news agency said. The row comes a day after 24 supporters of ousted President Hosni Mubarak were acquitted of organizing attacks on protesters during last year's uprising. Hundreds of demonstrators rallied in the capital Cairo against the acquittals. They accused the judges of "complicity" with the former Egyptian leadership and said they wanted to "purify justice".

'Battle of the Camels': The group on trial had been accused of sending men on camels and horses to break up a protest in Cairo in 2011. In the incident, later called the Battle of the Camels, Mubarak supporters charged protesters in Tahrir Square. It became one of the most notorious incidents of the uprising and left nearly a dozen people dead. Some senior members of the old regime were among those accused. They included Fathi Srur and Safwat al-Sherif, former speakers of Egypt's two houses of parliament. Prosecutors said Mr Sherif, who was also the secretary general of Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NPD), had "contacted MPs, members of the NDP and financiers of the party, inciting them to disperse the protests in Tahrir Square by force and violence". Mr Mahmoud was appointed in July 2006. Officials quoted by Reuters said that an assistant to the general prosecutor would take up the responsibilities until a new
prosecutor general was appointed. Meantime, Egypt reopens Pyramid of Chefren to tourists. Egypt has reopened one of its great pyramids as it attempts to revive a tourism industry hit by last year's uprising. Antiquities Minister Muhammad Ibrahim reopened the Pyramid of Chefren (Khafre) and six ancient tombs at Giza after a long restoration project. He said he was keen to stress that Egypt is a safe country for tourists. The BBC's Jon Leyne in Egypt says visitor numbers have only just begun to pick up after last year's revolution. The problem, he says, is that many Westerners still see Egypt as something of a war zone. Mr Ibrahim, who inspected the newly opened monument, said other archaeological sites were due to be opened across Egypt in the coming months. Egypt's tourism industry was badly hit last year following the unrest that ousted President Hosni Mubarak. Scenes of violent protests, mainly in the capital Cairo, were broadcast around the world. The country is still suffering from a weak economy and a volatile security situation. The Pyramid of Chefren is the second largest at Giza and the tomb of the Pharaoh Khafre from ancient Egypt's fourth dynasty. It rises to a height of 136m (446ft) BBC News Middle East (October 11, 2012)

November 4, 2012: Bishop Tawadros new pope of Egypt's Coptic Christians'

Bishop Tawadros has been chosen as the new pope of Egypt's Coptic Christians, becoming leader of the largest Christian minority in the Middle East. His name was selected from a glass bowl by a blindfolded boy at a ceremony in Cairo's St Mark's Cathedral. Three candidates had been shortlisted. The 60-year-old succeeds Pope Shenouda III, who died in March aged 88. He succeeds as attacks on Copts are on the increase, and many say they fear the country's new Islamist leaders. The other two candidates were Bishop Raphael and Father Raphael Ava Mina. They were chosen in a ballot by a council of some 2,400 Church and community officials in October. Their names were written on pieces of paper and put in crystal balls sealed with wax on the church altar. A blindfolded boy - one of 12 shortlisted children - then drew out the name of Bishop Tawadros, who until now was an aide to the acting leader, Bishop Pachomius. Bishop Pachomius then took the ballot from the boy's hand and showed it to all those gathered in the cathedral. Strict measures were in place to make sure there was no foul play during the televised ceremony: the three pieces of paper with candidates' names were all the same size and tied the same way. Copts say this process ensures the selection is in God's hands. Bishop Tawadros will be enthroned in a ceremony on 18 November. The new pope has studied in Britain, and has
also run a medicine factory, the BBC's Jon Leyne in Cairo reports. He is a man of broad experience and with managerial skills, our correspondent says, adding that he will need all those talents to lead the Copts as they face an uncertain future in a country now debating the role of Islam following last year's revolution. The BBC correspondent says no-one in Egypt expects the new pope to introduce radical changes to the deeply conservative church. Pope Shenouda died in March. Under his leadership, the Coptic Church expanded significantly, including outside its traditional Egyptian base. He was a passionate advocate of unity among the Christian churches, and also clashed with then President Anwar Sadat, particularly over their conflicting views on the future of Egypt's relationship with Israel. Coptic Christians have long complained of discrimination by the Egyptian state and the country's Muslim majority. But when President Hosni Mubarak was ousted last year and succeeded by the Muslim Brotherhood, their fears grew. In October 2011, 25 people died in clashes with the security forces after a protest march in Cairo over the burning of a church. Many leading Copts believe the new pope should play a less overtly political role. Activists hope that ordinary Copts can make their voices heard by winning more seats in the now democratically elected parliament. Yet the new pope may want to make his views known quickly on how prominent a role Islamic, or Sharia, law should play in the new constitution currently under negotiation.

Estimates of the number of Coptic Christians in Egypt range from 5.6m to 11m Descended from ancient Egyptians: Coptic language is derived from ancient Egyptian. Split from Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics in 451AD in row over nature of Christ on most issues doctrinally similar to Eastern Orthodox Church. So from this ancient ritual, some very modern problems face Egypt's new Coptic pope.

Cairo's Tahrir Square fills with anti-Morsi protesters'

Tens of thousands of protesters opposed to Egypt's president and the sweeping new powers he assumed last week are in Cairo's Tahrir Square, hours after a new constitution was hastily approved. The Islamist-dominated constituent assembly finished voting on the draft in the early hours on Friday. The draft will now be sent to Mr Morsi, who is expected to call a referendum. The Supreme Constitutional Court is due to rule on Sunday on whether the assembly should be dissolved. Senior judges have been in a stand-off with the president since he granted himself sweeping new powers. An emergency decree issued last week said Mr Morsi's decisions could not be revoked by any authority, including the judiciary, until the new constitution had been ratified and a fresh parliamentary
election is held. It also stated that the courts could not dissolve the constituent assembly. Mr Morsi says he will give up his extraordinary powers once the new constitution is approved by a referendum. Live TV feeds from Tahrir Square showed tens of thousands of people in the square. Demonstrators chanted slogans, including, "The people want the fall of the regime", one of the rallying cries against ex-President Hosni Mubarak, who was toppled last year. In the city of Alexandria, supporters and opponents of Mr Morsi clashed on the streets, but there were no immediate reports of injuries. The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist parties have called on their supporters to join a rally in Cairo on Saturday. Protesters confronted Mr Morsi at Friday prayers at the al-Sharbatli mosque after the preacher defended the president's recent actions, comparing them with incidents in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The BBC's Jon Leyne, in Cairo, says that infuriated worshippers, who chanted against the president, while Mr Morsi himself got up to say that did not agree with the preacher. It is an illustration of how inflamed and divided opinion is across Egypt, our correspondent says.

Divisive move: Mr Morsi insists the powers he has taken are meant to be temporary and will protect the transition to a constitutional democracy. However, their extent has raised fears that he might become a new strongman. UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay has written to Mr Morsi, asking him to reconsider his decree. In her letter, Ms Pillay "warned that approving a constitution in these circumstances could be a deeply divisive move", her spokesman said. Mr Morsi's decree of 22 November gave the 100-member constituent assembly until January to complete the draft constitution. Opponents filed 43 separate lawsuits challenging the process. When the Supreme Constitutional Court said it would soon rule on the lawsuits, supporters of the president on the assembly decided to pass a rushed draft to head off the threat of dissolution. During a marathon session that began on Thursday and continued through the night, the assembly voted on and passed all 234 articles. Among the historic changes to Egypt's system of government, the draft limits the amount of time a president can serve to two four-year terms. It also introduces some civilian oversight of the military establishment. The draft keeps in place an article defining "principles of Sharia", or Islamic law, as the main source of legislation. November 30, 2012:

Egypt clashes erupt despite proposal to end crisis’
Islamists fought protesters outside the Egyptian president's palace on Wednesday, while inside the building his deputy proposed a way to end a crisis over a draft constitution that has split the most populous Arab nation. Stones and petrol bombs flew between opposition protesters and supporters of President Mohamed Mursi who had flocked to the palace in response to a call from the Muslim Brotherhood. Two Islamists were hit in the legs by what their friends said were bullets fired during the clashes in streets around the compound in northern Cairo. One of them was bleeding heavily. A leftist group said Islamists had cut the ear off one of its members, inflicting serious head wounds on him. Riot police began to deploy between the two sides to try to end the violence which flared after dark despite an attempt by Vice President Mahmoud Mekky to calm the political crisis. He said amendments to disputed articles in the draft constitution could be agreed with the opposition. A written agreement could then be submitted to the next parliament, to be elected after a referendum on the constitution on December 15. "There must be consensus," he told a news conference, saying opposition demands must be respected to overcome the crisis.

Opinion leader Amr Moussa, a former foreign minister and secretary-general of the Arab League, said Mursi should make a formal offer for dialogue if his opponents were to consider seriously Mekky's ideas for a way out of the political impasse. "We are ready when there is something formal, something expressed in definite terms, we will not ignore it," Moussa told Reuters during talks with other opposition figures. Opposition leaders have previously urged Mursi to retract a decree widening his powers, defer the plebiscite and agree to revise the constitution, but have not echoed calls from street protesters for his overthrow and the "downfall of the regime".

UNDER SIEGE: Mursi had returned to work at his compound a day after it came under siege from protesters furious at his assumption of extraordinary powers via an edict on November 22. The president, narrowly elected by popular vote in June, said he acted to stop courts still full of judges appointed by ousted strongman Hosni Mubarak from derailing a constitution meant to complete a political transition in Egypt, long an ally of Washington and signatory to a 1979 peace deal with Israel. Rival groups skirmished earlier outside the presidential palace on Wednesday. Islamist supporters of Mursi tore down tents erected by leftist foes, who had begun a sit-in there.
"They hit us and destroyed our tents. Are you happy, Mursi? Aren't we Egyptians too?" asked protester Haitham Ahmed. Mohamed Mohy, a pro-Mursi demonstrator who was filming the scene, said: "We are here to support our president and his decisions and save our country from traitors and agents." Facing the gravest crisis of his six-month-old tenure, Mursi has shown no sign of buckling, confident that Islamists can win the referendum and a parliamentary election to follow. Many Egyptians yearn for an end to political upheaval that has scared off investors and tourists, damaging the economy. Mekky said street mobilization by both sides posed a "real danger" to Egypt. "If we do not put a stop to this phenomenon right away ... where are we headed? We must calm down."

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton weighed into Egypt's political debate, saying dialogue was urgently needed on the new constitution, which should "respect the rights of all citizens". Clinton and Mursi worked together last month to broker a truce between Israel and Hamas Islamists in the Gaza Strip. "It needs to be a two-way dialogue ... among Egyptians themselves about the constitutional process and the substance of the constitution," Clinton told a news conference in Brussels. Washington is worried about rising Islamist power in Egypt, a staunch U.S. security partner under Mubarak.

"LAST WARNING": The Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwan Muslimeen) had summoned supporters to an open-ended demonstration at the presidential palace, a day after about 10,000 opposition protesters had encircled it for what organizers dubbed a "last warning" to Mursi. "The people want the downfall of the regime," they chanted, roaring the signature slogan of last year's anti-Mubarak revolt. Officials said 35 protesters and 40 police were wounded. The "last warning" may turn out to be one of the last gasps for a disparate opposition that has little chance of scuttling next week's vote on a constitution drawn up over six months and swiftly approved by an Islamist-dominated assembly. State institutions, with the partial exception of the judiciary, have mostly fallen in behind Mursi. The army, the muscle behind all previous Egyptian presidents in the republic's six-decade history, has gone back to barracks, having apparently lost its appetite to intervene in politics. In a bold move, Mursi sacked Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the Mubarak-era army commander and defense minister, in August and removed the sweeping powers that the military council, which took over after Mubarak fell, had grabbed two months earlier. The liberals, leftists, Christians, ex-Mubarak followers and others opposed to Mursi have yet to generate a mass movement or a grassroots political base to challenge the Brotherhood. Investors have seized on hopes that Egypt's turbulent transition, which has buffeted the economy for two years, may
soon head for calmer waters, sending stocks 1.6 percent higher after a 3.5 percent rally on Tuesday. Egypt has turned to the IMF for a $4.8 billion loan to help it out of a crisis that has depleted its foreign currency reserves. The government said on Wednesday the process was on track and its request would go to the IMF board as expected. The board is due to review the facility on December 19. CAIRO (Reuters), by Yasmine Saleh and Marwa Awad (December 5, 2012)

Egyptian constitutional referendum, 2012’

A constitutional referendum was held in Egypt in two rounds on 15 and 22 December 2012. Egyptians living abroad were scheduled to vote between 8 and 11 December. Voting for expatriates had been delayed until 12 December 2012 and was extended until 17 December 2012. Voters were asked whether they approve of the draft constitution that was approved by the Constituent Assembly on 30 November 2012. Unofficial results reported on 23 December 2012 found that only 32.9% of the electorate voted and that the constitution was approved with 63.8% of the vote in favor over the two rounds of polling.

During the campaign, supporters of the draft constitution argued that the constitution would provide stability. Most opponents argued that the constitution was too favorable to the Muslim Brotherhood and did not grant sufficient minority rights. However, the Salafi Front also opposed the constitution, arguing that it should have been based more closely on Sharia law. The supreme committee for supervising the constitution referendum was formed on 3 December 2012. Mohammad Salim Al-Awa stated that a new Constituent Assembly would be formed within three months through general elections if the draft Constitution was voted down. The new assembly would have six months to write the new constitution. The general secretary of the constitution referendum supreme committee resigned for health reasons.

Background: The Constituent Assembly was originally elected by Parliament in March 2012, before being dissolved by a court in April after it was deemed unconstitutional. A second Assembly was elected by Parliament during the summer. The second Constituent Assembly produced on 30 November 2012 a 234 article draft constitution, after it approved each article individually during a 19 hour meeting starting on 29 November. Judicial response: Egyptian Judges Club members agreed to boycott the referendum. However the decisions of the club are non-binding on its members. Judge Mohamed Awad, who is a member of the Judges for Egypt reform movement, said that 90 percent of judges would
monitor the referendum. Mohamed Gadallah, the legal adviser to the Egyptian president, stated that Egypt's Supreme Judicial Council would oversee the referendum. The judges that were on strike responded that the Supreme Judicial Council decision was not final and that judges could individually refuse to participate.

The result of a controversial referendum on Egypt's new constitution’

Updates: The process has been delayed as officials check allegations of fraud. Early unofficial results have suggested more than 60% of voters said "yes" to the document, which is endorsed by President Mohammed Morsi. But officials are still investigating opposition allegations of fraud and the result will now come on Tuesday. There has been violent unrest in the past few weeks over the constitution. If the document passes, elections must take place within two months and the deep polarization in the country is likely to continue, the BBC's Bethany Bell in Cairo reports. In the meantime, legislative powers will pass to parliament's upper chamber, the Islamist-controlled Shura Council.

'Vote for stability' State media reports of the results following Saturday's second and final round of the referendum suggested that some 63% of voters had backed the charter. Turnout was low, estimated at 30%. A member of the supreme election commission said on Monday appeals and allegations of irregularities in the voting process were still being investigated. He said the results would be announced on Tuesday. Earlier, another member of the commission, Mohamed el-Tanobly, told Agence France-Presse it wanted the referendum to "really reflect the will of the Egyptian people". The opposition National Salvation Front said on Sunday the vote had been marred by "fraud and violations". It said these included polling stations opening late, Islamists seeking to influence voters and a lack of judges to supervise. Spokesman Amr Hamzawy told a news conference the National Salvation Front had urged the commission to investigate the irregularities but he also appeared to anticipate a "yes" vote.

He said: "We do not consider this constitution legitimate. We will continue to attempt to bring down the constitution peacefully and democratically." The opposition says the draft constitution fails to protect the freedoms and human rights that were sought in the uprising that ended Hosni Mubarak's rule last year. It accuses the president of pushing through a text that favors Islamists and does not sufficiently protect the rights of women or Christians.
But the Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of Mr Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood, said it hoped the "yes" vote would begin to heal divisions and bring stability. On the Freedom and Justice Party Facebook page, its leader, Saad al-Katatni, wrote that its members were "extending our hands to all political parties and all national forces", adding: "We will all start a new page". However, the crisis is continuing to affect the country's economic status. On Monday, the ratings agency Standard and Poor's downgraded Egypt's long-term credit rating because of the ongoing tension.

Lowering the country's long-term rating to B- from B, it said: "A further downgrade is possible if a significant worsening of the domestic political situation results in a sharp deterioration of economic indicators such as foreign exchange reserves or the government's deficit." The latest unrest began after Mr Morsi issued a decree on 22 November stripping the judiciary of the power to challenge his decisions. After an outcry, the president revoked much of the decree, but he refused to back down on the referendum on the draft constitution. BBC News Africa (December 23, 2012)

Egypt: Voting Turnout in Referendum 32.9 Percent - Election Commission

Updates: out of 33 percent of all eligible voters cast their vote in Egypt's constitution referendum, head of the commission overseeing the referendum Judge Samir Abul Maati said. Out of 17,058,317 voters (32.9 percent), 10,693,911 voted "yes" (63.8 percent) is while 6,016,101 voted "no" (36.2 percent). The number of valid votes is 16,755,012 while that of invalid votes is 303,395. The first round of the referendum took place on December 15 in 10 governorates and the second took place on December 22 in 17 governorates. At the press conference announcing the final results, Abul Maati said that commission members were chosen according to the law, adding, "We were not chosen for our persons, but for our positions.” The commission received complaints from different bodies about violations that occurred during the voting process, Abul Maati said. The reported violations included the absence of judicial supervision, the invalidity of the procedures, violations outside polling stations, and the prevention of observers and journalists from entering polling stations, he explained. Abul Maati stated that the commission is only responsible for receiving and examining these complaints and resolving them, adding that "the general prosecution is the only body that can investigate electoral crimes." "After examining complaints, the results of some sub-committees
were annulled because of flaws that require annulling their results," Abul Maati said. Aswat Masriya (Cairo) December 25, 2012

Egypt - New Constitution Finally Approved

Updates: Final results of Egypt's 2012 draft constitution were released by the country's Higher Electoral Commission, showing an approval rate of over 63 per cent after two rounds of voting. The latest round took place on Saturday, December 22, 2012 with voters from 17 governorates taking part in the poll whose turnout was about 30 per cent. The first round held on December 15, 2012 in 10 governorates.

The Xinhua news agency reported that the release of results was delayed to give electoral officials time to check appeals and allegations of fraud by the opposition. The National Salvation Front promised at a press conference on Sunday, December 23, 2012 to appeal against the results of the constitutional referendum, alleging that there had been fraud and other violations. Meanwhile, President Mohamed Mursi over the weekend ordered Parliament's Upper Chamber, the Shura Council, to convene after the release of official results of the constitutional referendum. The new constitution gives the Shura Council powers to legislate until the Lower House of Parliament is elected within the next two months, the AP news agency said.

President Mursi has held legislative powers for months since a court disbanded the Lower House, saying the law governing the election of its members was unconstitutional. The President also over the weekend appointed 90 members to the Shura Council in an attempt to make the body more representative. The Council is expected to focus on passing a new law on the rules for Parliamentary elections. Under the new constitution, Sharia remains the main source of legislation while Al-Azhar, Sunni Islam's leading authority, is to be consulted on matters concerning Sharia. On the other hand, Christianity and Judaism are to be the main source of legislation for Christians and Jews. The right to beliefs is protected and the State's obligations are limited to Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Presidential mandates are limited to two four-year terms of office. (December 25, 2012)

Egypt's Upper House Takes Power, President Addresses Upper House’

Updates: Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi will address the Shura Council (upper house of parliament), which now holds legislative power, on Saturday. Mursi temporarily held legislative power following the
dissolution of the People's Assembly, but now that the constitution has passed, the upper house will act as legislature until a new assembly is elected. The Shura Council, who convened on Wednesday following the appointment of 90 new members, is expected to draft a new parliamentary elections law to pave the way for the election of a lower house of parliament within the next two months. Source: Aswat Massriya (Cairo) (December 27, 2012)

Egyptian president cancels visit to Ethiopia in light of violence at home'

January 26, 2013: President Morsi will not participate in an African summit, preferring to lead current meeting with defense council dealing with Egypt's turbulent situation: Teargas once again overwhelms Egypt's air. President Mohamed Morsi cancels his trip to Addis Ababa for the African summit scheduled for Sunday due to the ongoing unrest in Egypt. Presidency Spokesman Yasser Ali says Morsi is currently in an emergency meeting with the National Defense Council, which includes the ministers of justice and information as well as the head of the national security apparatus.

The meeting is set to discuss the violence and deaths that occurred Friday during protests marking the second anniversary of Egypt's revolution and how to hold accountable those responsible. Nationwide clashes between protesters and police on Friday left at least 10 dead, including nine in Suez and hundreds injured. Meanwhile, in the coastal city of Port Said clashes continue after a court handed 21 of the 73 defendants in the Port Said massacre trial the death sentence early on Saturday. Seventy-three defendants, including nine security officials, three Masry football club officials and a number of fans, are on trial for their suspected role in Egypt's worst-ever football tragedy, where more than 70 died in an attack on fans. The trial of the remaining defendants will be looked into on 9 March. At least 15 have been killed so far in the ongoing Port Said clashes, including two police officers. Ahram Online,

Egypt: Pope Tawadros rebukes Morsi over Cathedral clash'

BBC News: April 9, 2013 - The leader of Egypt's Coptic Christians has accused the country's president of "negligence" following deadly clashes outside the main cathedral in Cairo. Pope Tawadros II said Mohammed Morsi had failed to protect the building, where two people died after being attacked by an angry mob of Muslims. The remarks were the strongest issued against President Morsi by Pope Tawadros since he took office in 2012. The weekend clashes between Muslims and Copts were Egypt's
worst in months. The two people - at least one of whom was a Christian - were killed after attending a funeral for four Christians who died in sectarian violence in Khosous, about 10 miles (15km) north of Cairo, the previous day. A Muslim was also killed in those clashes, which began after inflammatory symbols were drawn on an Islamic institute, provoking an argument. The dispute escalated into a gun battle between Christian and Muslim residents, while Christian-owned shops were also attacked. Coptic Christians, who make up about 10% of the population, have long complained of discrimination and have suffered an increase in attacks by Muslims since the fall of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

'Action not words' In a telephone interview on the private ONTV channel, Pope Tawadros said Mohammed Morsi had "promised to do everything to protect the cathedral but in reality we don't see this". He said the failure to do so "comes under the category of negligence and poor assessment of events". "We need action not only words... There is no action on the ground," he said, adding that "the Egyptian Church has never been subject to such [attacks] even in the worst ages". The violence erupted on Sunday when mourners leaving St Mark's Cathedral clashed with local residents. Police fired tear gas to break up the violence. More than 89 people were injured, the state news agency said.

Mourners inside the cathedral had earlier chanted slogans against President Morsi. Witnesses told local TV stations that the violence started when a mob attacked the Copts as they left the cathedral, pelting them with stones and petrol bombs. The Christians responded by throwing stones back, the witnesses said, until police arrived and attempted to quell the unrest, firing tear gas into the cathedral compound. Afterwards, Mr Morsi denounced the violence in a phone call to Pope Tawadros. "Any attack against the cathedral is like an attack against me personally," he was reported as saying. He also called for an immediate investigation. The Islamist Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political arm of Mr Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood movement, posted a statement on its Facebook page stressing its "utter rejection and condemnation of violence".

Egyptian President reportedly being held hours after being ousted'

July 4, 2013: Ousted President Mohammed Morsi was reportedly being held at an undisclosed location Wednesday night, hours after the military toppled him and suspended the constitution. Ahmed Aref, a spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood party, told Reuters both Morsi and an aide were being held but he didn’t know their location. A security official said they were at a military intelligence facility, Reuters said.
In announcing Morsi’s ouster earlier in the day, Egypt’s top military commander said he had been replaced by the chief justice of the constitutional court as interim head of state. In addition, Gen. Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi said the country’s constitution has been temporarily suspended and new elections would be held. At least 14 people were killed in clashes between Morsi’s supporters and opponents following the announcement, Reuters said, citing the state news agency MENA. Eight of the dead were reported to be in the northern city of Marsa Matrouh, with three killed and at least 50 wounded in Alexandria. Another three were killed in the southern city of Minya.

In Washington, President Obama issued a statement Wednesday night saying the administration was “deeply concerned” by the decision to remove Morsi and urged the military to avoid “any arbitrary arrests” of the president and his supporters. Obama also said in light of Morsi’s ouster he had “directed the relevant departments and agencies to review the implications under U.S. law for our assistance to the government of Egypt.” At the same time, a security official in Cairo said the head of Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood political party and the organization’s deputy chief had been arrested, reportedly in connection with an escape from prison in 2011.

The state-run newspaper Al-Ahram said arrest warrants were being issued for 300 members of the Brotherhood, Reuters reported. Millions of anti-Morsi protesters in Tahrir Square and around the country erupted in cheers at the news of Morsi’s ouster, setting off fireworks and shouting “God is great” and “Long live Egypt.” Morsi said on his presidential Facebook page that the military’s action “represents a military coup and it is unacceptable.” A U.S. official said nonessential diplomats and embassy families had been ordered to leave Egypt amid the unrest. The State Department issued a warning urging U.S. citizens in the country to leave.

In appointing Adli Mansour the new interim leader, el-Sissi also said a government of technocrats would be formed with “full powers” to run the country. He did not specify how long the transition period would last or when new elections might be held. Top military officials and opposition leaders met Wednesday and agreed on a political roadmap for the country’s future, el-Sissi said. A new presidential cabinet will be formed as well as a national reconciliation committee, which will include youth movements that have been behind anti-Morsi demonstrations. El-Sissi also warned said the military would deal “decisively” with any violence sparked by the announcements.
Before el-Sissi’s address, Egyptian troops, including commandos in full combat gear, were deployed across much of Cairo, including at key facilities, on bridges over the Nile River and at major intersections. Witnesses told Reuters that the army erected barbed wire and barriers around Morsi’s work compound, and moved in vehicles and troops to prevent supporters from getting to his palace. A travel ban was put on Morsi and the head of his Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Badie, as well as Badie’s deputy Khairat el-Shater, officials told the Associated Press. Minutes before the military’s deadline for Morsi to resolve the nation’s political crisis passed Wednesday afternoon, the embattled leader called for “national reconciliation,” but vowed he would never step down.

Millions were in the main squares of major cities nationwide, demanding Morsi’s removal, in the fourth day of the biggest anti-government rallies the country has seen, surpassing even those in the uprising that ousted against his autocratic predecessor Hosni Mubarak. Critics say Morsi set the nation on a path toward Islamic rule. Khaled Daoud, spokesman of the main opposition National Salvation Front, which pro-reform leader Mohamed ElBaradei leads, said that ElBaradei, Sheik Ahmed el-Tayeb, grand imam of Al-Azharmosque, and Pope Tawadros II, patriarch of Egypt’s Coptic Christian minority, were part of the Wednesday meetings with military leaders. Employees at Egypt’s state TV station said military officers were present in the newsroom monitoring its output, but not interfering with their work.

In an emotional 46-minute speech late Tuesday, Morsi vowed not to step down and pledged to defend his constitutional legitimacy with his life in the face of three days of massive street demonstrations calling for his ouster. The Islamist leader accused Mubarak loyalists of exploiting the wave of protests to topple his regime and thwart democracy. “There is no substitute for legitimacy,” said Morsi, at times angrily raising his voice, thrusting his fist in the air and pounding the podium. He warned that electoral and constitutional legitimacy “is the only guarantee against violence.”

Clashes in Cairo and elsewhere in the country left at least 23 people dead, most in a single incident near the main Cairo University campus. The latest deaths take to 39 the number of people killed since Sunday in violence between opponents and supporters of Morsi, who took office in June last year as Egypt’s first freely elected leader. At the U.S. State Department media briefing Wednesday, spokeswoman Jen Psaki restated the administration’s priority on the democratic process. “It’s never been
about one individual,” she told reporters. “It’s been about hearing and allowing the voices of the Egyptian people to be heard.” Pentagon Spokesman George Little said there has been no change in terms of the U.S. military pre-positioning assets in and around Egypt in the event they are called upon to assist the U.S. embassy in Cairo.

Accession to power of President Mohammed Mursi – By Election

Tentative election calendar – November

EGYPT – Acknowledging Historical events, Public speculation and debates et-al’

February 9, 2013: Unrest In Egypt Over Port Said Football Riot Sentences'

News tip: Rival football fans in Egypt have protested over sentences handed down over riots at a match in Port Said in February last year. The court upheld 21 death sentences and handed down prison terms to other defendants over the violence, which claimed 74 lives. Most victims were supporters of a Cairo team, and fans there criticized the sentencing for not going far enough. In Port Said, fans of the local team accused the court of unfairness. Many people believe police in the city stood by during the rioting in revenge for the role of football supporters in the unrest which toppled Hosni Mubarak as president a year before. Police deny the accusation. Ahead of Saturday’s sentencing, the army assumed policing in Port Said, which saw fresh unrest last week. Police in at least 10 of Egypt's 29 provinces have been holding an unprecedented strike in protest at being used by the government of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi to confront protesters. Hanging sentence: Fans had surged through the streets to attend a rally at their stadium, and a police club and the Egyptian football federation building were set alight in the chaos. Both buildings are close to the team's stadium and a senior security official was quoted as saying by AFP news agency that some fans had stormed the club and torched it. Confirming the capital punishment sentences, Judge Sobhi Abdel-Maguid specified "the death penalty by hanging".

Port Said governorate security chief Essam Eddin Samak and nine other defendants were each sentenced to 15 years in jail. Six received 10-year jail terms and two were sent to prison for five years. A single defendant got a 12-month jail term and 28 of the accused, including seven policemen, walked free. The court's verdicts, broadcast live on TV, were initially cheered by fans of Cairo's al-Ahly team, who are known as the Ultras. "First we were happy when we heard the 21 death sentences," one
fan told AFP news agency. "We were cheering and didn't hear the rest of
the verdict. Then we were very angry." Two demonstrators died on
Saturday in Cairo in clashes with police, the head of the city's ambulance
service told the BBC. One was killed following inhalation of tear gas and
the second by birdshot. The clashes, near Tahrir Square, were originally
thought to be connected to the football riot trial, but it later transpired to
be unrelated. Unrest in the area flared up last week when police tried to
open Tahrir Square to traffic. In Port Said, fans of local team al-Masri
were already angry that all of those sentenced to death were supporters
of the team. Two senior police officers were jailed but seven other security
officials were acquitted, fuelling local resentment. Some demonstrators
tried to block the Suez Canal by untying speedboats and setting them
adrift while others sought to interrupt car ferry traffic. Military police
recovered five of the speedboats and brought them back to shore, but two
were still drifting, one witness told Reuters news agency. However, the
canal was protected by troops backed by tanks, and military helicopters
hovered above the crowd. Before Saturday, the canal, a global shipping
route, was considered off-limits by protesters, correspondents say. At
least seven people - civilians and security officials - died earlier this week
in unrest in the city. The original death sentences imposed on the 21
defendants in January sparked a local revolt.

Port Said 2012 football deaths

74 people killed in Port Said stadium on 2 February 2012

Clashes broke out between rival fans of Port Said club al-Masry and
Cairo's al-Ahly

Fans flooded on to pitch, attacking Ahly players and fans as match ended

Most died of concussion, cuts and suffocation

The largest death toll in Egypt's football history

February 10, 2013: Egyptians Turn To Black Market For Hard Currency'

A run on Egypt's pound has left foreign currency in short supply and
driven some dealers into the streets in search of people with U.S. dollars
to sell, spawning a new black market. The currency's decline was
triggered by a political uprising that swept Hosni Mubarak from power in
2011 and it has officially lost 8 percent of its value since Dec. 30. Black
market rates are even weaker, a sign that although the central bank
managed to stem the slide in official trade last week, Egyptians are
nervous about holding on to pounds. Some dealers tout discreetly outside regulated foreign exchange bureaus and banks in Cairo, illegally offering a better rate to those looking to sell hard currency. "There are no dollars. Everyone that walks in asks for dollars but supply is scarce," said one of the dealers. The central bank took steps last week to manage the rate including narrowing the pound’s trading band. It was last bid at 6.71 to the dollar on Sunday in interbank trade. That is 13.4 percent weaker than its level on the eve of the uprising that led to Mubarak’s downfall, pitching Egypt into two years of turmoil that has scared off tourists and investors. On Cairo’s streets, one dealer offered to sell dollars at a rate of 6.95 on Thursday - 3.5 percent weaker than the official price. Another asked for 6.89 pounds to the dollar.

The pound’s decline has been reflected in a drop in Egypt's foreign reserves, which fell to $13.6 billion at the end of January - below the $15 billion level needed to cover three months' imports. The reserves stood at $36 billion on the eve of the uprising against Mubarak. Complicating a business climate already weighed down by political unrest, some importers say they are having to source their foreign exchange needs from what they call the parallel or open market. One senior executive at an Egyptian company that imports goods from abroad said companies were able to source their dollar needs from the black market, but forecast that supply would tighten further in the coming weeks.

"Corporations are not having problems arranging for U.S. dollars from the open market. However, there is a spread that ranges between 16 to 20 piasters between the bank rates and the open market," he said. Speaking on condition of anonymity because he was discussing an illegal market, he forecast that dollar supply would dry up further because of factors such as political uncertainty. "What will happen? Most probably you will start seeing products disappearing from supermarket shelves," he said. "The challenges that we are facing now are nothing compared to what we could be heading to."

CENTRAL BANK GOVERNOR NOT WORRIED: Central bank governor Hisham Ramez has said he is not worried about the emergence of a black market. Bonook El Youm, a weekly supplement published by the financial daily Al-Alam Al-Youm, "quoted him as saying he is confident the authorities have the tools to eliminate it completely. There is no sign of dealers being targeted by the police. Officials at the central bank did not respond to calls or emails from Reuters requesting comment on the subject. Bankers seeking to meet their clients' foreign currency needs
through official channels face a wait of weeks or months, said one who deals with major corporate clients. "I used to order it and get it on the next day or the following one at most," said the banker, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not permitted to talk to the media. The decline in foreign reserves drove the central bank to introduce the system of regular U.S. dollar auctions in late December to avoid a full blown currency crisis. The weighted average bid at those auctions has been setting the official exchange rate in banks and foreign currency bureaus. Banks had been allowed to buy or sell dollars or their equivalent to other banks in a band of 0.5 percent above or below the average bid at the auction.

The central bank narrowed the band, setting a limit of 0.01 pounds above or below the weighted average bid. Dealers say the currency has recovered somewhat since hitting a black market low of around 7.5 pounds to the dollar in late January, when deadly street violence flared during protests marking the second anniversary of the anti-Mubarak revolt. But some forecast that the pound could come under further pressure with political instability pushing back the prospects of Egypt concluding a deal with the International Monetary Fund seen as vital to securing a $4.8 billion loan. "The current FX management framework could continue to play for time, though (the Egyptian pound) will remain vulnerable in the meantime," Bank of America Merrill Lynch said in a report last week. "Domestic U.S. dollar demand is likely to strengthen and the gap between the official and parallel rates is likely to widen." Simon Kitchen, strategist for investment bank EFG-Hermes, added: "It's difficult to see a long term equilibrium in the FX market until the political situation improves and we at least see a deal with the IMF."

February 11, 2013: Brotherhood Man Spurned For Role As Egypt's Top Cleric'

Egypt's leading religious scholars spurned the ruling Muslim Brotherhood's choice and picked an apolitical Islamic law professor on Monday to be the country's top cleric. The post of grand mufti of Egypt carries wide influence over legislation and social affairs. "Dr Shawki Ibrahim Abdel-Karim Allam, professor of Islamic law in Tanta University, got the highest number of votes and the matter has been sent to the president to issue his decision," a statement from al-Azhar seat of learning said. President Mohamed Mursi, a Muslim Brotherhood member, is expected to formalize his appointment soon. The contender groomed by the Brotherhood, Abdul Rahman al-Bar, 50, a 30-year veteran of the conservative Islamist group
and member of its decision-making Supreme Guidance Council, was not even in the top three nominees, officials said. The grand mufti delivers televised sermons on major Muslim holidays and is empowered to issue opinions (fatwas) on any matter, influencing legislation on social and cultural issues, public behavior and court rulings.

Allam chairs the department of jurisprudence in the Sharia law faculty in al-Azhar's university in the northern Nile delta town of Tanta. The mufti's office gave his age as 55. He will serve until the normal retirement age of 60. "This is big vote of trust in me and I hope to God that I will be up to the task," Allam told Reuters. He declined to discuss his views until the president makes the appointment. A panel of Islamic scholars took the decision after "detailed study of the applicants based on scientific legal standards, the adoption of al-Azhar's moderate agenda and an estimation of their psychological and moral suitability", the official statement said. Insiders said the Brotherhood had pushed for Bar despite warnings that his candidacy would be seen as part of a power grab to dominate all state institutions. "It seems some council members were sensitive to the strong public resistance to Bar's nomination, which led them to change their mind," a senior official in the mufti's office said. He said the new mufti had no political or sectarian religious affiliations. The selection was made amid anti-Mursi public protests on the second anniversary of the resignation of veteran President Hosni Mubarak, ousted by a pro-democracy uprising.

February 11, 2013: Update 1-UAE Attracts $8 billion in Investment In 2012 After Arab Spring' The United Arab Emirates attracted about 30 billion dirhams ($8.2 billion) of direct foreign investment last year, the UAE's prime minister said. Large amounts of capital fled Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen and other Arab countries in search of safe havens after political and economic turmoil erupted in those countries in early 2011. Because of its political stability and Dubai's status as an international business centre, the UAE has attracted a large share of the capital.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum's office said in a statement that the UAE had received 30 billion dirhams in all foreign direct investment last year. But speaking earlier the Sheikh insisted that it would be wrong to think the UAE was benefitting from the Arab Spring, as stability in countries hit by the unrest would benefit the whole region including the UAE. "If we had peace and stability, we would have more than 30 billion...," Sheikh Mohammed, who is also Dubai's ruler, said during an open forum for the public to quiz government officials.
Dubai's real estate market began to recover last year from a crash in the previous few years, partly because foreign investors saw the emirate as a safe haven, property analysts said. The UAE attracted $7.68 billion of foreign direct investment from all countries in 2011, up from $5.50 billion in 2010, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Sheikh Mohammed also said the UAE had invested much more than 30 billion dirhams in countries hit by the Arab Spring. The oil-rich UAE has pledged billions of dollars in aid to help stabilize cash-strapped Arab states since the uprisings began, and UAE companies have shown interest in investing in North Africa.

February 11, 2013: Egypt Orders Cleric Held Over Elbaradei Death Call'

Egypt's public prosecutor ordered the arrest of a Muslim cleric who said leaders of the main opposition coalition should be condemned to death under Islamic law for seeking to topple President Mohamed Mursi, the state news agency said on Monday. Hardline Salafi Muslim cleric Mahmoud Shaaban was ordered held for questioning over comments in an online video clip for the religious channel al-Hafez calling for the death of leaders of the opposition National Salvation Front. He singled out liberal NSF politician Mohamed ElBaradei and leftist presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahy. Shaaban "will be detained for questioning over charges that he incited the death of leaders of the NSF", MENA news agency reported. The NSF has called for regular protests against Mursi, the Muslim Brotherhood politician elected president in June, accusing him of trying to monopolize power. ElBaradei, a former head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog, criticized the Islamist-led authorities last week for not acting to stop Shaaban. The government subsequently deployed a police guard at his home and outside the houses of other opposition figures. Shabaan had said that the NSF leaders wanted power and were "burning Egypt" to get it. "It is clear now their sentence in God's law is death," he said in the video posted on YouTube on February 2.

February 11, 2013: Egypt Protesters, Police Clash On Mubarak Anniversary'

Protesters demanding the departure of Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi clashed with police outside his palace on Monday on the second anniversary of the overthrow of veteran autocrat Hosni Mubarak. Dozens of youths threw rocks at the Ettihadiya palace after a peaceful march by thousands of demonstrators who accused Mursi's conservative Muslim Brotherhood of hijacking Egypt's democratic revolution and seeking to monopolize power. Police responded by firing water cannon and teargas
from the walls of the presidential compound, which have been raised in some places and shielded by barbed wire after petrol bombs set fire to a building in the grounds last week. The clashes, which appeared smaller and less violent than previous bouts of anti-Mursi unrest, were broadcast live on some television channels. "We may be few in numbers but we will not back down from fighting criminals dressed up in police uniform," said Ahmed Farghaly, a protester outside the presidential palace. Riot police later emerged to chase the protesters away from the palace and into side-streets.

The presidency's spokesman Yasser Ali called on all parties to condemn the clashes. "Violence will burn the fingers of those who call for it and use it … The presidency supports the continuation of peaceful protests and freedom of expression but any attempt to veer off peaceful protesting will be dealt with firmly," Ali said on state television late on Monday. He dismissed speculation that President Mursi may sack the existing cabinet and form a national unity government, saying it had "no basis in truth". The main Cairo rally was in the central Tahrir Square, focal point of three weeks of demonstrations in 2011 that led to Mubarak's resignation. Mubarak, who ruled Egypt with an iron fist for 30 years, was sentenced to life imprisonment last June for his role in killing protesters after a trial seen as setting a precedent for holding Middle East autocrats to account. Opposition parties are now demanding Mursi be put on trial over the deaths of nearly 60 demonstrators in anti-government protests that erupted on January 25, but the public prosecutor says there is no evidence to link the democratically elected president with the deaths.

February 11, 2013: Libya To Shut Egypt, Tunis Borders For Anniversary'

Libya will shut its borders with Tunis and Egypt for five days as a security measure ahead of the country's two-year anniversary marking the ouster of Muammar Gaddafi, the prime minister said on Monday. Ali Zeidan announced the closure during a news conference as part of list of security measures following concerns about potential militia violence surrounding the celebrations. "As of midnight on February 14th until the 18th, no one will be allowed to cross the Libyan borders between Egypt or Tunis as a security precaution," he told reporters on Monday. On February 17, Libyans will mark two years since an armed revolt ended Gaddafi's rule and celebrations are planned to begin on February 15. But many Libyans, particularly those in the east, are urging citizens to take to the streets to protest the government's inability to so far provide security by disarming militias or moving towards writing a constitution. Security is particularly a
concern in the east of the country where violence towards foreigners and police assassinations have become a regular occurrence by unknown extremist militias. On January 25, the United Kingdom urged their nationals to leave Benghazi citing a "specific and imminent" threat to Westerners days after a deadly attack by Islamist militants in neighboring Algeria. Flights to Libya were suspended by Lufthansa and Austrian Airlines until after the February 17 citing "tensions on the ground" in the country. Many international organizations, including the United Nations mission in Libya and Western embassy staff will be on lockdown starting on February 14 as a safety measure. Security in Tripoli and Benghazi have been increased in the past week, with several random check points by Libyan police and militias affiliated with the interior ministry popping up on all major roads. "We will focus on tightening security at airports also in order to avoid any issues that will derail the celebrations," Zeidan said.

February 12, 2013: Italian Ex-spy Chief Gets 10 Years In CIA Case'

Italy's former military intelligence chief was sentenced to 10 years in jail for his role in the kidnapping of an Egyptian Muslim cleric in an operation organized by the United States. An American former CIA station chief was this month sentenced in absentia to seven years in jail after imam Abu Omar was snatched from a Milan street in 2003 and flown to Egypt for interrogation during the United States' "war on terror". The Milan appeals court sentenced Niccolo Pollari, former head of the Sismi military intelligence agency, to 10 years in prison and his former deputy Marco Mancini to nine years. The court also awarded a provisional 1 million Euros in damages to the imam, the Ansa news wire reported, as well as 500,000 Euros to the imam's wife.

Nicola Madia, a lawyer for Pollari, said he was disturbed by the decision and that his client would appeal to Italy's highest court. Pollari will not have to go to jail until the appeals process has been exhausted. Madia said Pollari had not been able to defend himself properly because successive Italian governments had declared the case to be covered by state secrecy laws. The sentences are part of the fallout from a campaign waged by then U.S. president George W. Bush after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. Abu Omar says he was tortured for seven months after being flown to Egypt in what was known as an "extraordinary rendition" operation. He was resident in Italy at the time of his abduction. Former CIA Rome station chief Jeffrey Castelli and two other American officials were convicted in their absence by the Milan appeals court for their part in the plot, but are unlikely to serve their
sentences. Human rights groups have been fighting to expose heavy-handed tactics used by the CIA during the Bush administration.

February 12, 2013: Egypt Activist Gendi Died After Car Crash, Not Torture - Doctor'

An Egyptian activist whose death provoked violent protests was killed in a car crash and was not tortured to death by police, a senior forensic official said. Fellow campaigners had said Mohamed el-Gendi, 23, was rounded up along with other youth protesters on Jan. 25, the second anniversary of the start of the Egyptian revolt against autocrat Hosni Mubarak. Security sources said he was taken to a state security camp, interrogated and tortured, drawing parallels with the brutal tactics used by Mubarak's henchmen during his rule. The interior ministry had already denied the accusations saying Gendi was hit by a car on Jan. 28, and taken to Cairo's Hilal hospital where he died some days later. That account was backed up by the assistant of Egypt's top forensic doctor, Emad al-Deib, who told Egypt's Al-Hayat channel on Tuesday: "The forensic report confirmed that the death of Mohamed el-Gendi was due to a car accident and dismissed he was subjected to any torture." Violent protests erupted during Gendi's funeral in Cairo and in his home town in the Nile Delta Town of Gharbiya last week.

February 12, 2013: Egypt's El-Baradei Urges Consensus To Win IMF Loan'

Egyptian opposition leader Mohamed ElBaradei called on Tuesday for a national consensus to secure an urgently-needed IMF loan and save the country from economic collapse within months. Ratings agency Moody's cut Egypt's credit rating on Tuesday, citing doubts about its ability to secure a requested $4.8 billion International Monetary Fund loan and the economic impact of a new round of political unrest. Moody also cited a further weakening in Egypt's external payments position given a large drop in foreign reserves in January as the country battles to stave off a currency crisis. ElBaradei, a former head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog, urged Islamist President Mohamed Mursi to appoint a strong, inclusive government with what he called a professional finance minister to work with the IMF. "No one will give a cent to Egypt ... without seeing real national cooperation," he told Al-Hayat TV in an interview. ElBaradei was the second major leader of the opposition National Salvation Front (NSF) to call this week for an agreement on a package of economic priorities, apparently setting political differences with Mursi aside for a while. Amr Moussa, a former Arab League chief and co-leader of the NSF, called for the government and opposition to agree to postpone parliamentary
elections expected in April for six months and work together on the economy. "We have in the Front top economic experts that see it is crucial to get the loan as a certificate of confidence in the Egyptian economy. But it will not happen without national consensus and a package of (economic) measures," ElBaradei said. "There should be political stability and a return of security and simultaneously the economy (will recover) and automatically tourism and investment will return," he added.

Egypt's central bank has said foreign reserves fell to $13.6 billion in January, below the $15 billion level needed to cover three months worth of imports. The NSF has been leading anti-Mursi public protests for months and has boycotted talks sponsored by Mursi to demand a national unity government, changes to the Islamist-leaning constitution, the sacking of the top public prosecutor, and the prosecution of police brutality. There was no immediate response from the government to Moussa's and ElBaradei's calls for an economic consensus. The second biggest Islamist movement, the Nour Party, said on Tuesday the loan agreement must be approved by a body of senior scholars at Al-Azhar, the state's top religious institution whose new role is embedded in the constitution. The United States urged Egypt this week to move fast to agree a loan deal with the IMF, reform its energy sector and guarantee investors against "arbitrary acts" to avert a deeper slide in its economy. Moussa demanded an urgent "reordering of priorities to mobilize all capacities to confront the present serious situation". He suggested Mursi's government and the opposition, made up of liberal, social democratic, leftist and Salafi parties, agree on a four-point initiative to restore public finances, reschedule the energy debt, revive tourism and investment and shield the poor from extra burdens. ElBaradei said Egypt faced an economic collapse "in two to three months" unless the government started to listen to the opposition and economic experts. Asked about the opposition's real objective, he said: "We don't want to oust Dr. Mursi. It's much bigger than that: we want the country to move on."

February 12, 2013: Egypt Court Jails Israeli For Two Years - Court Sources'

An Egyptian court sentenced an Israeli man to two years in prison for crossing illegally into the Sinai peninsula, court sources said. Egypt said in December it had arrested the man after he slipped into the Sinai's Taba region and took photographs of security buildings. State media at that time identified the man, Andrei Pshenichnikov, as a 24-year-old army officer. Israel had no comment on the case, but an official speaking on
condition of anonymity denied the man held by Egypt was in the military. Pshenichnikov's mother told Israel Radio in December her son had completed compulsory military service and had lived in Palestinian territory in the occupied West Bank before heading to Egypt with plans to meet up with friends in Cairo. Israeli media described him as a pro-Palestinian activist, and reported a month ago at the time of his arrest that Pshenichnikov had crossed into Egypt with plans to enter the Gaza Strip, an Islamist-ruled territory off limits to Israelis. The ruling by the court in the Nuweiba area of Sinai was issued on Monday. The court sources said Pshenichnikov had not given a convincing explanation for why he crossed into Egypt illegally when he could have entered as a tourist. Sinai has suffered from lax security since Egypt's 2011 uprising, which overthrew President Hosni Mubarak. Egypt regained the peninsula, which Israel occupied during a 1967 war, after the two signed a peace deal in 1979. The two countries have maintained an uneasy peace since then, and their relations have been marred by several high-profile cases in which Egyptian authorities accused Israel of espionage. Israeli tourists have continued to holiday in the Sinai, although in lower numbers since a spate of bomb attacks on resorts from 2004 to 2006.

February 12, 2013: U.S. Concerned At "Climate Of Impunity" In Egypt'

The United States expressed concern on Tuesday about growing political polarization in its major ally Egypt and a "climate of impunity" over abuses by police and security forces in the most populous Arab nation. At a news conference after a four-day visit, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, Democracy and Labor Michael Posner avoided direct criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood-led government of President Mohamed Mursi. But he said young people's economic and political concerns, which had led to recent violent protests, should be addressed, and the government should "reach out widely" to other political and social forces and hold consultations on concerns about the Islamist-tinged constitution it pushed through in December. "While recognizing the need for the Egyptian government to take specific steps to build confidence and to address valid concerns, we condemn this violence unequivocally," Posner said. Noting that the authorities had the right and duty to ensure public order and stop violence by protesters, he said: "At the same time there are credible reports that police and security forces have used excessive force. "We have heard reports of cases throughout Egypt where the police have resorted to torture and other forms of cruel treatment of those in their custody. There are also reports of deaths in custody," he said.
Some abuses were under investigation but there had been few successful prosecutions so far. "This contributes to a climate of impunity and a lack of meaningful accountability for these actions," Posner said, adding that authorities had also failed to identify and punish perpetrators of "an alarming number of rapes and other acts of violence against women".

Asked whether human rights were better or worse in Egypt than under former President Hosni Mubarak, toppled in a popular uprising two years ago, he declined to make a comparison but said young people's expectations were higher now. Pressed about opposition calls for an early presidential election to bridge the growing rift in society, he said it was vital that all political forces engage in the campaign for parliamentary elections due in April. He declined repeatedly to discuss the idea of an early presidential poll. Mursi was elected last June to serve a four-year term. Posner met the Egyptian foreign and justice ministers, a senior aide to Mursi, the nation's top Muslim cleric and a range of civil society leaders.

He reaffirmed Washington's concerns about legislation under discussion regulating non-governmental organizations and the right to demonstrate, saying it was vital but should respect international standards.

February 13, 2013: Egyptian Cabinet Backs Bill On Protests, Critics Cry Foul'

Egypt's Islamist-led government approved a draft law on demonstrations on Wednesday that backers say meets international democratic standards but critics believe will give the state too much power to stifle protest. The bill will be sent to the Shura council, the Islamist-dominated upper house of parliament, which currently has sole legislative power during Egypt's transition to democracy. "This law has been drafted to restore peace to protests, which are considered to be among the strongest rights granted to the nation," Justice Minister Ahmed Mekky said, according to the state news agency MENA. Heba Morayef, Egypt director of Human Rights Watch, countered: "This law seems designed to actually increase restrictions, whereas the existing legal framework, which dates back to the early 20th century, was bad enough. "If one protester commits a crime, it gives the police the right to disperse the entire protest," Morayef told Reuters. Close to 60 people died in violent protests against Islamist President Mohamed Mursi between Jan. 25, the second anniversary of the start of Egypt's popular uprising, and Feb. 4. Protests on everything from political rights to economic grievances have become a routine feature of public life in the last two years, prior to which they were severely repressed. Under the draft law, Mekky said, peaceful protest would be a right that must be protected and this would require formal notification of demonstrations at
least three days in advance. Police may order the route of a protest march to be changed.

CRITICISM: Morayef said the draft law would give police too sweeping powers to disperse protests, and included unacceptable restrictions on demonstrating within 200 meters (yards) of government buildings, parliament, embassies, courts, places of worship, police stations, courts and military zones. However, Mekky said the draft gives the police the duty to protect protests. It aims to avoid any confusion between the right of peaceful assembly, which the state is obliged to protect, and acts of aggression against people and property, or obstruction of highways and public facilities. The authorities would have the right to seek a court injunction banning a demonstration, and the bill would outlaw blocking roads and squares and wearing masks or scarves obscuring the face. One contentious article would prohibit carrying banners or chanting slogans that include insults, defamation or contempt of "heavenly" religions, or that stir sedition, violence or hatred or include an offence to state bodies and institutions. Visiting U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Michael Posner said on Tuesday that it was important that the Egyptian government "respect international principles of free assembly and association and the critical role civil society plays in any democratic society". Thousands of Egyptian riot police and conscripts have gone on strike to demand the interior minister's resignation, saying he is too close to the country's Islamist leadership, security sources said on Wednesday. The Interior Ministry said the walkout was based on an erroneous belief that the government planned to ban demonstrations, pitching the police into confrontation with protesters.

February 13, 2013: Egyptian Court Orders Release Of One Of Mubarak's Aides'

A Cairo court on Wednesday ordered the release from prison of one of deposed Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's closest aides after he was granted a retrial in a corruption case. Four other high-ranking officials from Mubarak's government, including a former prime minister, were also given retrials in their graft cases, according to state media. Many former officials have been convicted on graft and other charges since Mubarak fell to a popular uprising in February 2011, but activists say the long, complicated legal proceedings have failed to produce real justice. Zakaria Azmi, Mubarak's former chief of staff, was sentenced last May to seven years in jail and fined 36.4 million Egyptian pounds ($6 million) on charges of making illegal gains. An appeals court recently ordered a retrial
in that case, and a separate criminal court ruled on Wednesday that Azmi must be released under a law that says a suspect can not be held in prison for more than 18 months.

Azmi has been in detention for about 22 months, state news agency MENA reported. The former top aide, one of the most senior members of Mubarak's inner circle, will still face travel and financial restrictions but not be confined to his home. Mubarak is in a military hospital. Last month a Cairo court granted him a retrial after he was jailed for life over the killing of protesters by security forces trying to quell the uprising against him. Also, an appeals court annulled the verdicts of former prime minister Ahmed Nazif, former interior minister Habib al-Adli and former finance minister Youssef Boutrous-Ghali in a separate graft case, MENA said. Boutros-Ghali fled abroad before his trial, while the other two have been in prison. The three had been convicted of squandering 92 million Egyptian pounds in public funds in a case involving irregularities in the procurement of vehicle license plates. Former tourism minister Zoheir Garrana was also granted a retrial in a case in which he is accused of illegally issuing licenses to tourism companies, MENA said. All four former officials also face separate graft cases, while Adli is further charged with involvement in the killing of protesters.

February 13, 2013: Egyptian Police Strike, Seek Interior Minister's Ouster'

Thousands of Egyptian riot police and conscripts have gone on strike to demand the interior minister's resignation, saying he is too close to the country's Islamist leadership, security sources said on Wednesday. The action takes place after security forces and anti-government demonstrators have clashed in the capital and other cities. At least 59 people were killed in protests between Jan. 25, second anniversary of the uprising that toppled former president Hosni Mubarak, and Feb. 4. The strikers, mostly conscripts but led by police officers, say Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim is "in thrall to the Islamist president" and must resign, said a general at the Cairo security directorate, who declined to give his name. Another officer also told Reuters that Ibrahim, who is a general, was too close to President Mohamed Mursi. They were also upset that he had directed the state security force to protect the headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's dominant political group. The Interior Ministry confirmed that some police officers and soldiers were on strike and said it had told commanders to listen to their demands. The ministry said the cause of the strike was that riot police erroneously believed the government planned to ban demonstrations which would pitch them into
confrontation with protesters. Pro-opposition daily Al Masry Al Youm splashed pictures of a rare police demonstration on its front page on Wednesday. It said officers were protesting against the "Brotherhoodization" of the ministry and demanding legal changes and danger money for having to deal with political violence. A police major, who requested anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the media, said: "Ibrahim is not neutral and has given orders to police to guard the headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood.

"He does not work to represent the interests of his personnel," the major said. The riot police feel they are dragged into politics by being forced to confront protesters during mass rallies, he said. "This ends up stoking hatred between the ministry and the people," the major said. The strikes have spread to state security camps in Daqahliya, Gharbiya, Sharqiya, Menya and Damietta provinces, the security sources said. The Interior Ministry has been at the forefront of clashes involving protesters, mainly young, who complain that Mursi has done little to reform the police since Mubarak was ousted two years ago. Police and security officials were involved in the torture of detainees in the Mubarak era, according to human rights groups and activists. Police reform was a demand of the 2011 revolution but no police officer has been punished for the deaths of around 850 protesters during the uprising. Both the general and the major said the riot police personnel have demanded that former Interior Minister General Ahmed Gamal be reinstated as he was more neutral. Hundreds of policemen demonstrated outside the security directorate in the port city of Alexandria, most wearing civilian clothes, to demand that Ibrahim step down. "The people demand the reform of the Interior Ministry," they chanted. "Leave, leave, Ibrahim!" Video footage circulated earlier this month showed a protester beaten and dragged naked across the ground by policemen during a protest in front of the presidential palace.

February 13, 2013: Divided Syria Confronted By All-out War'

MiG warplanes roar low overhead to strike rebels fighting to oust President Bashar al-Assad on the fringes of Damascus, while artillery batteries pound the insurgents from hills overlooking a city divided between all-out war and a deceptive calm. Whole families can be obliterated by air raids that miss their targets. Wealthy Syrians or their children are kidnapped. Some are returned but people tell grim tales of how others are tortured and dumped even when the ransom is paid. People also tell of prisoners dying under torture or from infected wounds: of looting by the government's feared shabbiha militias or by rebels fighting to throw out
the Assad family. That is one Damascus. In the other, comprising the central districts of a capital said to be the oldest continually inhabited city in the world, the restaurant menus are full, the wine is cheap and the souks are packed with shoppers. Employees report for work, children go to school and shops are open, seemingly undeterred by the din and thud of war. The two cities exist a few miles apart - for now. For Damascus and its outskirts are rapidly descending into civil war and everything that comes with it - lawlessness, looting, kidnapping and revenge killings. Like the rest of the country, the capital and its suburbs are crawling with armed gangs. "Anybody can come to you pretending he is security and grab you in broad daylight, put you in a car and speed off and nobody dares interfere or rescue you," says Lama Zayyat, 42. "A girl in the 7th grade was kidnapped and her father was asked to pay a big ransom. The same happened to other children," she said. Nobody really knows who is behind the kidnappings. In one gang, one brother is in charge of abductions while another brother negotiates with the victims. The fear is palpable.

NO SECT HAS BEEN SPARED: The war has not yet reached the heart of the capital, but it is shredding the suburbs. In the past week, government troops backed by air power unleashed fierce barrages on the east of the city in an attempt to flush out rebel groups. Most of central Damascus is controlled by Assad's forces, who have erected checkpoints to stop bomb attacks. The insurgents have so far failed to take territory in the centre. Just as loyalist forces seem unable to regain control of the country, there looks to be little chance the rebels can storm the centre of Damascus and attack the seat of Assad's power. For most of last week the army rained shells on the eastern and southern neighborhoods of Douma, Jobar, Zamalka and Hajar al-Aswad, using units of the elite Republican Guard based on the imposing Qasioun mountain that looms over the city. The rebels, trying to break through the government's defense perimeter, were periodically able to overrun roadblocks and some army positions, but at heavy cost. Jobar and Zamalka are situated near military compounds housing Assad's forces, while Hajar al-Aswad in the south is one of the gateways into the city, close to Assad's home and the headquarters of his republican guard and army. Since the uprising began two years ago, 70,000 people have been killed, 700,000 have been driven from Syria and millions more are displaced, homeless and hungry. No section of society has been spared, whether Christians, Alawites or Sunnis, but in every community it is the poor who are suffering most. Electricity is sporadic. Hospitals are understaffed as so many doctors - often targeted on suspicion of treating rebel wounded - have fled. Hotels and businesses
barely function. Outside petrol stations and bakeries, queues are long and supplies often run out, meaning people have to come back the next day. Those who can afford it pay double on a thriving black market. The scale of the suffering can be seen in the ubiquitous obituary notices on the walls of Damascus streets - some announcing the deaths of whole families killed by shelling. As if oblivious of these private daily tragedies, the government insists the situation is under control, while the rebels say the Assads' days are numbered.

NOWHERE NEAR OVER: Ordinary Syrians are convinced their ordeal is nowhere near over. While they believe Assad will not be able to reverse the gains of the rebels, they cannot see his enemies prevailing over his superior firepower, and Russian and Iranian support. "The regime won't be able to crush the revolution and the rebels won't be able to bring down the regime," said leading opposition figure Hassan Abdel-Azim. "The continuation of violence won't lead to the downfall of the regime, it will lead to the seizure of the country by armed gangs, which will pose a grave danger not only to Syria but to our neighbors". "Right now no one is capable of winning," said a Damascus-based senior Arab envoy. "The crisis will continue if there is no political process. It is deadlock." Other diplomats in Damascus say the United States and its allies are getting cold feet about arming the rebels, fearing the growing influence of Islamist radicals such the al-Nusra Front linked to al-Qaeda, banned last year by Washington. Some remarks recur again and again in Damascus conversations: "Maybe he will stay in power, after all", and, above all, "Who is the alternative to Assad?" "At first I thought it was a matter of months. That's why I came here and stayed to bear witness to the final moments," said Rana Mardam Beik, a Syrian-American writer. "But it looks like it will be a while so I am thinking of going back to the U.S." Loyalty to Assad is partly fed by fear of the alternative. Facing a Sunni-dominated revolt, Syria's minorities, including Christians and Assad's own Alawites - an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam - fear they will slaughtered or sidelined if the revolution succeeds and Sunni fundamentalists come to power.

MINORITIES' FEAR: Many Christians are already trying to emigrate to countries such as Sweden, diplomats say. "The minorities have every right to be frightened because no one knows what is the alternative. Is it a liberal, civic, pluralistic and democratic state, or is the alternative an Islamist extremist rule that considers the minorities infidels and heretics?" said Abdel Azim. The government tells the minorities the only alternative to Assad is Islamism. Loyalist brutality against the Sunni majority is in
danger of making this a self-fulfilling prophecy, by sucking in jihadi extremists from Libya to Saudi Arabia. "I am not with the regime but we are sure that if Bashar goes the first people they will come for are the Alawites, then the Shi'ites and then us Christians. They are fanatics," said George Husheir, 50, an IT engineer. At the Saint Joseph Church in Bab Touma, the old Christian quarter of Damascus, Christians in their dozens, mostly middle-aged and older couples, gathered for mass on a Friday morning. "We don't know what the future holds for us and for this country," said the priest in his sermon. "The Christians of Syria need to pray more." Nabiha, a dentist in her 40s, said: "Bashar is a Muslim president but he is not a fanatic. He gave us everything. Why shouldn't we love him. Look at us here in our church, we pray, we mark our religious rituals freely, we do what we like and nobody interferes with us." The fear of the Christians extends to the Alawite and minority Shi'ites. "If Bashar goes we definitely have to leave too because the Sufianis (Sunni Salafis) are coming and they are filled with a sectarian revenge against us," said one wealthy middle class Shi'ite.

COSTLY WAR: Alongside sectarian hatreds, class and tribal acrimony is also surfacing. Wealthy Sunnis in the capital are already in a panic about poor Sunni Islamists from rural areas descending on their neighborhoods. "When they come they will eat us alive", one rich Sunni resident of Damascus said, repeating what a cab driver dropping him in the posh Abou Roummaneh district told him: "Looting these houses will be allowed." Yet many activists feel protective of the revolution, despite the brutal behavior of some Islamist rebels. "People talk about chaos and anarchy after Assad, but so what if we have two years of a messy transition? That is better than to endure another 30 years of this rule," said Rana Darwaza, 40, a Sunni academic in Damascus. Prominent human rights lawyer Anwar al-Bunni said the suffering is a price that had to be paid. "Those on the ground will continue to fight even with their bare hands", he said. He said there are thousands of prisoners in horrific conditions in Assad's jails. Some suffocate in overcrowded cells while others die under torture or from untreated wounds. "They don't give them medical treatment or pain killers or antibiotics. They leave them to die," he said. Close watchers of Syria predict that if there is no settlement in a few months the conflict could go on for years. Yet the economy is collapsing, leaving the government to rely on dwindling foreign reserves, private assets and Iranian funds. There is no tourism, no oil revenue, and 70 percent of businesses have left Syria, said analyst Nabil Samman. "We are heading for destruction, the future is dark", he added. Added to the religious animosity between the Sunni majority and the Alawite minority
who took control when Hafez al-Assad seized power in 1970 are social and economic grievances fuelled by the predatory practices of the elite. This resentment extends to young middle class Syrians who feel they have lost a way of life and that their country is being used by regional powers for proxy war. "All the regional point-scoring is taking place in Syria. We have Libyan fighters and Saudis fighting for freedom in Syria, why are they here? Let them go and demand freedom in their own countries?," said banker Hani Hamaui, 29. Two years into the uprising, Assad is hanging on. Some will always back him and others want him dead. But many just want an end to the fighting. They may have to wait for some time. Signs daubed on the gates to the city by Assad's troops are a reminder that the battle for Damascus will be costly. "Either Assad, or we will set the country ablaze", they say.

February 13, 2013: Egypt Floods Gaza Tunnels To Cut Palestinian Lifeline'

Egyptian forces have flooded smuggling tunnels under the border with the Palestinian-ruled Gaza Strip in a campaign to shut them down, Egyptian and Palestinian officials said. The network of tunnels is a vital lifeline for Gaza, bringing in an estimated 30 percent of all goods that reach the enclave and circumventing a blockade imposed by Israel for more than seven years. Reuters reporters saw one tunnel being used to bring in cement and gravel suddenly fill with water on Sunday, sending workers rushing for safety. Locals said two other tunnels were likewise flooded, with Egyptians deliberately pumping in water. "The Egyptians have opened the water to drown the tunnels," said Abu Ghassan, who supervises the work of 30 men at one tunnel some 200 meters (yards) from the border fence. An Egyptian security official in the Sinai told Reuters the campaign started five days ago. "We are using water to close the tunnels by raising water from one of the wells," he said, declining to be named. Dozens of tunnels had been destroyed since last August following the killing of 16 Egyptian soldiers in a militant attack near the Gaza fence. Cairo said some of the gunmen had crossed into Egypt via the tunnels - a charge denied by Palestinians - and ordered an immediate crackdown. The move surprised and angered Gaza's rulers, the Islamist group Hamas, which had hoped for much better ties with Cairo following the election last year of Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi, an Islamist who is ideologically close to Hamas. A Hamas official confirmed Egypt was again targeting the tunnels. He gave no further details and declined to speculate on the timing of the move, which started while Palestinian faction leaders met in Cairo to try to overcome deep divisions.
CRITICISING CAIRO: Hamas said on Monday the Egyptian-brokered talks, aimed at forging a unity government and healing the schism between politicians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, had gone badly but had not collapsed. While Gaza's rulers have been reluctant to criticize Mursi in public, ordinary Gazans are slightly more vocal. "Egyptian measures against tunnels have worsened since the election of Mursi. Our Hamas brothers thought he would open up Gaza. I guess they were wrong," said a tunnel owner, who identified himself only as Ayed, fearing reprisal. "Perhaps 150 or 200 tunnels have been shut since the Sinai attack. This is the Mursi era," he added. The tunnelers fear the water being pumped underground might collapse the passage ways, with possible disastrous consequences. "Water can cause cracks in the wall and may cause the collapse of the tunnel. It may kill people," said Ahmed Al-Shaer, a tunnel worker whose cousin died a year ago when a tunnel caved in on him. Six Palestinians died in January in tunnel implosions, raising the death toll amongst workers to 233 since 2007, according to Gazan human rights groups, including an estimated 20 who died in various Israeli air attacks on the border lands. Israel imposed its blockade for what it called security reasons in 2007. The United Nations has appealed for it to be lifted. At one stage an estimated 2,500-3,000 tunnels snaked their way under the desert fence but the network has shrunk markedly since 2010, when Israel eased some of the limits they imposed on imports into the coastal enclave. All goods still have to be screened before entering Gaza and Israel says some restrictions must remain on items that could be used to make or to store weapons. This ensures the tunnels are still active, particularly to bring in building materials. Hamas also prefers using the tunnels to smuggle in fuel, thereby avoiding custom dues that are payable on oil crossing via Israel.

February 13, 2013: Diesel Shortage Pushes Egyptians To The Brink'

Fathy Ali is beyond anger as he queues for hours in a line of 64 trucks and buses to fill his tank with scarce subsidized diesel fuel, known in Egypt as "Solar." "This has become part of my life. I come and wait for hours or days, depending on my luck," the chain-smoking bus driver said at a besieged gas station on Cairo's Suez High Road, wrapped in a scarf and thick coat for the long ordeal. "At the start it used to upset me a lot but now I've kind of given up." Diesel supplies are drying up as a cash-strapped government struggles to cap a mounting bill for subsidies it has promised the IMF it will reform to secure an elusive $4.8 billion loan desperately needed to keep a sagging economy afloat. The situation appears near breakdown with growing shortages, unsustainable subsidies
and foreign exchange reserves running out, raising the risk that fuel bottlenecks lead to food shortages and pose a risk to political stability.

Foreign reserves are down below $15 billion, less than three months' imports, despite deposits from Qatar and Turkey. The Egyptian pound has lost 8 percent of its value this year and a black market has emerged for hard currency. The nation's strategic reserve of diesel fuel is down to three days' supply, the official MENA news agency "ed a government official as saying last week. Bakeries that use diesel to make staple subsidized bread have been told to keep 10 days' fuel supply but not all have the capacity. The Muslim Brotherhood-led government of President Mohamed Mursi this week postponed for up to three months a rationing system for subsidized fuel due to start in April in what looks like an attempt to avoid upsetting voters before parliamentary elections due that month. But reforms cannot be delayed for long, economists say. "Fuel shortages are a symptom of the strains on Egypt's unsustainable subsidy system," said Simon Kitchen, an economist at EFG-Hermes in Cairo.

DOWN-MARKET: Two government measures have aggravated the problem. In December, the subsidy on 95-octane petrol used by the wealthiest Egyptians was scrapped. That drove some motorists down-market to buy lower-grade fuel, raising the demand for subsidized 92-octane gasoline. Then in a drive to curb theft, smuggling and other abuses, the government restricted distribution of heavily subsidized low-grade gas oil used by trucks, tractors and buses to filling stations owned and operated by the military. That caused longer lines at the pumps and increasing economic disruption. At several filling stations, queues led to fights breaking out this week, Egyptian media reported.

The situation is so serious that Mursi held an emergency meeting with ministers about it on Tuesday night and instructed the energy minister to ensure sufficient supply, according to presidential spokesman Yasser Ali. Minister for Petroleum and Mineral Resources Osama Kamal said subsidizing Solar, sold at a give-away price of 1.25 Egyptian pounds ($0.19) a liter, costs the government $35 million a day. Altogether, energy subsidies will cost 120 billion Egyptian pounds in the fiscal year to end-June, up from 115 billion pounds the previous year, he said. They account for almost all of the forecast 135 billion pound budget deficit. Until, when the diesel shortage became the number one topic of television and radio talk-shows, the government seemed to be in denial. "There is no shortage," Kamal said. "There is a crisis in the distribution of Solar, not in the availability of it." Asked whether a shortage of hard currency was
constraining fuel imports, he said: "Financial resources are still available for imports but they must be reserved for the most important priorities."

To drivers and tour operators, the result is the same. Khaled el-Manawi, a senior board member of the Egyptian travel agents' association, said the government was harming his industry, already hard hit by political turmoil, by withdrawing subsidized fuel from tourist boats. Businessman George Bishoy, who owns a fashion accessories store in the affluent Cairo suburb of Heliopolis, said his business had suffered a lot from delays in the delivery of imported goods. The daily al-Ahram "ed drivers complaining about the emergence of a black market in which a liter of diesel is sold at double the normal price. The spokesman of the independent drivers' union, Tarek el-Bahary, told Reuters: "The Solar problem is devastating. Drivers are suffering daily and the elected president has failed to solve this crisis." "The number of trucks has not increased, the number of trips has not increased but the government is unable to provide the Solar and unable to come up with creative solutions to solve the problem," he said.

February 14, 2013: Ruling Party Aims For Outright Majority In New Parliament'

The Muslim Brotherhood's political party aims to win an outright majority in Egypt's forthcoming parliamentary elections without making alliances with other more hardline Islamist groups, its leader said on Thursday. Saad el-Katatni, 61, became the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) leader in October, replacing Mohamed Mursi who had become the first elected president of Egypt since the overthrow of veteran authoritarian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011. "The Freedom and Justice Party will aim to get a majority (in parliament). We expect more popular support and an increase in our number of seats beyond what we held in the previous parliament," Katatni told a news conference. The FJP won about 40 percent of the vote in a parliamentary election last year, short of an absolute majority, although Islamist groups won a total of about 70 percent of the seats. The assembly was dissolved by a court order months later because the electoral rules were deemed unconstitutional. Katatni was the speaker of that short-lived parliament. Since the fall of Mubarak, Islamists have moved to the forefront of politics with organizational skills and finances unmatched by liberal and leftist rivals. But the Brotherhood-led government has faced growing hostility from opponents who accuse it of striving to monopolies power rather than seek consensus on political rights and economic reform, sparking protests that have turned violent.
Although he earlier pledged to forge a broader political front before the parliamentary vote, Katatni said the FJP would not make deals with other Islamist groups such as the Salafist al-Nour party, its biggest religious rival. "The FJP will coordinate to find alliances with other political forces but until now we have not decided yet who we will seek to form an alliance with," he said. "The Salafi parties and in particular Al-Nour have announced they do not wish to ally with the FJP," Katatni said, signaling fierce competition among Islamists in the next election. An official at the presidency told Reuters the vote was slated for the end of April or early May and would likely involve three rounds of voting, guarded by the armed forces. Next week, the constitutional court will submit its review of a parliamentary election law to the Shura council, the sole legislative body during the transition, which will adopt the law by the following week, judicial sources said.

February 14, 2013: Egyptian Regulator Appeals Against Court's YouTube Ban'

Egyptian authorities appealed against a court order banning the video file-sharing site YouTube for a month over an amateur video that denigrates the Prophet Mohammad, saying the ruling was unenforceable. "The National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority has presented an appeal to halt implementation of the verdict," said a statement from the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. Egypt's administrative court ordered the ministries of communication and investment to block YouTube, owned by Google, inside the country because it had carried the film "Innocence of Muslims", said the state news agency MENA. The low-budget 13-minute video, billed as a film trailer and made in California with private funding, provoked a wave of anti-American unrest in Egypt, Libya and dozens of other Muslim countries in September. The video depicts the Prophet as a fool and a sexual deviant. For most Muslims, any portrayal of the Prophet is considered blasphemous. A statement issued after talks between ministry officials and the telecoms regulator said it was technically impossible to shut down YouTube in Egypt without affecting Google's Internet search engine, incurring potentially huge costs and job losses. "The government cannot carry out the contents of the verdict within Egypt's borders," the statement said. The only step the authorities could take was to block the offending film within Egypt, which had already been done. Only the United States had the capability to shut down YouTube, it said. "Blocking YouTube would affect the search engine of Google, of which Egypt is the second biggest user in the Middle East," the statement said. This would cause losses to the economy of up to hundreds
of millions of Egyptian pounds (tens of millions of dollars) and affect thousands of jobs, it added. In a statement, Google said it had created a simple mechanism for legal authorities to request the blocking of content viewed as illegal.

February 14, 2013: Arabs Mired In Messy Transitions Two Years After Heady Uprisings' Two years on, the euphoria has long gone. The flame of revolt that first flared in Tunisia, previously one of the Arab world's quietest corners, consumed autocrats there, in neighboring Egypt and, more violently, in Libya. Contained in Bahrain, it flickered on in Yemen where in time a veteran leader was pushed aside. In Syria, it is still being fiercely fought over. All Arab countries have felt the heat. Gritty political transitions are under way in nations where "revolution" has triumphed, ushering in contests over power, identity and religion, continued economic and social malaise, new opportunities for Islamist radicals, lawlessness and a surge in sexual violence against women that has gained publicity. Among a host of unintended consequences is an outflow of weapons and fighters from Libya after the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi that has helped to destabilize neighboring Mali. Another is rising tension between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims across a region already buffeted by rivalry between Shi'i Iran and U.S.-aligned Sunni powers led by Saudi Arabia. In Bahrain, the Saudis helped to crush protests led by the Shi'i majority, and in Syria, mainly Sunni rebels are battling Iran's principal Arab ally, President Bashar al-Assad, whose rule is built around his Shi'i-rooted Alawite minority. Many Arabs are proud of their new freedom to speak out and to take to the streets against real and perceived wrongs, but it has proved trickier than many expected to create prosperity, fill power vacuums left by entrenched rulers and convert police states into stable democracies governed by the rule of law.

"WORK AND DIGNITY": Unemployment, poverty and rising prices, which helped to fuel the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, remain grievances in economies hit by unrest that has deterred tourists and foreign investors. "Our basic demand was work and dignity, but now under the Islamists we don't have either," said Aymen Ben Slimane, an unemployed young man in the Tunisian capital. "We have no confidence in them to achieve the goals of our revolution." Last week's assassination of opposition politician Chokri Belaid plunged Tunisia into its worst crisis since the uprising and raised fears of violence in a country where an Islamist-led government faces strong liberal and secular opposition. Zouhour Layouni, a 22-year-old student in a headscarf, said Tunisia had won freedom of expression and could accommodate differences between Islamists like her and their
opponents. "The assassination of Belaid is an exception," she said. "Now we ask secular people to give us time and they will see the results. Our hope is that Tunisia will be united." Tunisia's troubles and those of other Arab nations in early stages of transition should come as no surprise. "These revolutions require a long-term perspective. It would have been unrealistic to think that in two years these countries would have transformed themselves into perfectly functioning democracies," said Eric Goldstein of Human Rights Watch. "It's important not to underestimate how much 25 years of dictatorship and the politics of fear and intimidation have distorted the political landscape," he said, adding that Tunisian political parties lacked experience in negotiating their differences peacefully. "They are learning as they go."

SOARING EXPECTATIONS: Well-organized Islamist groups such as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Tunisia's Ennahda party have won elections after revolts they did not start, but after years of preaching that "Islam is the solution" both have collided with the complexity of managing modern economies and governing unruly societies. "People are angry because they feel the revolution did not change their lives," Ennahda's leader Rached Ghannouchi told Reuters this week, acknowledging how hard it is to meet popular expectations raised by the overthrow of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. Relatively moderate Islamist parties face pressure from ultra-orthodox Salafis, whose drive to write stricter codes into new constitutions and laws dismays their liberal opponents. Some Salafis, but by no means all, are ready to pursue their goals through violence. The attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions in Tunis, Cairo and Benghazi in September, following an anti-Islam video that surfaced in America, illustrated the danger. A smattering of Arab voices reflecting on the ferment of the last two years provides individual insights, even if they cannot encompass the complexity of changes in the Middle East that will take years, if not decades, to shake down. In Egypt, liberal activist Abdelrahman Mansour, who helped organize protests on Jan. 25, 2011 that snowballed into an uprising against Hosni Mubarak, said Islamists had failed to bring Mubarak-era officials to account or to establish a real democratic transition after an interim period of military rule. "Instead, Islamists staged a series of power grabs that marginalized other political forces," he said, arguing that the military and their Islamist successors had sidelined youth groups and others who had prepared plans for reform of the interior ministry, judiciary and other state institutions. "Their aim was to contain the revolution and its youth by convincing the average Egyptian citizen that the youth were the ones destroying the revolution, not the ones who ignited it." Samir Wisamee, an Islamist activist, said Mubarak's removal
and the holding of free and fair elections were major gains, but also lamented "the lack of accountability within the Interior Ministry and the cycle of violence that plagues the country".

SYRIA'S AGONY: While hundreds of people have died in unrest in post-Mubarak Egypt, the violence is dwarfed by that in Syria, where the United Nations says nearly 70,000 have now been killed since a revolt against Assad began with peaceful protests in March 2011. Syrian opposition campaigner Fawaz Tello, now in exile, said he was saddened by the human cost of freedom extracted by Assad's "savage" ruling system and by international inaction. But his biggest disappointment was a Syrian opposition that he said lacked leadership, political acumen and administrative skill. "It has not managed to connect effectively with the spirit of the revolution and it is responsible for corrupting the revolt by trying to buy loyalties of the rebels," he said. "But I'm proud that a defenseless people who have challenged a totalitarian system that has been strengthening itself for the last half a century are on their way to victory," Tello said. After so much carnage, the outcome of Syria's conflict is far from clear. Nor can anyone be sure what will emerge in other countries where Arabs rose up for freedom and dignity. Nathan Brown, at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said the uprisings expressed "disgust in the prevailing political order and a hope that if societies could just get their politics right they would solve their pressing problems". Structures that kept self-serving Arab leaders in power had been toppled, "but there was no systematic thought about what should positively replace these systems, and building good ones has been far harder than anticipated", he said. "The biggest obstacle to such a process in Egypt and Tunisia - the two most hopeful countries two years ago - has not been the actions or attitudes of any particular actor but the deep polarization among various camps and the inability to bridge differences or even find a common language."

February 15, 2013: Top Egypt Archaeologist Sees Hope For Future In Past'

The keeper of Egypt's archaeological treasures sees hope for the nation's future in its pharaonic past. Mohammed Ibrahim, head of the antiquities ministry, likens Egypt's turbulent emergence from autocracy to the periods of decline that afflicted the nation on the Nile between the fall and rise of its three ancient kingdoms. "We have passed through similar periods like that, even in antiquity," said Ibrahim, custodian of the pyramids, tombs and temples that bear witness to one of the world's oldest civilizations. "Every time Egypt passes through this period, it
recovers very quickly, very strongly." But for now, Ibrahim's ministry, is suffering from the repercussions of unrest that has hit the economy hard, driving away the tourism which pays his ministry's bills. Excavation work led by the ministry has ground to a halt because of the financial squeeze. The unrest has also stopped many foreign-financed digs by deterring the archaeologists. But the 59-year old Egyptologist is upbeat: foreign archaeologists are starting to come back. And while the periods of decline between the ancient kingdoms could last 200 years, he expects Egypt to bounce back much sooner this time around. "Egypt will be something new," he told Reuters in an interview at his offices in the medieval citadel that towers over the mosques of Cairo's Islamic quarter.

Head of Egyptian antiquities since late 2011, Ibrahim fills a post occupied for a decade by Zahi Hawass, who left office several months after the uprising that swept former President Hosni Mubarak from power after 30 years of autocratic rule. With a doctorate in Egyptology from France, his career includes time as director of Sakkara, an ancient necropolis south of Cairo best known for the stepped pyramid that was a forerunner of the pyramids at Giza. The job of managing Egypt's ancient antiquities is more complicated today than it was in Mubarak's era. The rise of Islamists repressed by the deposed autocrat has brought with it calls from a radical, if tiny, fringe for the destruction of pharaonic monuments on the grounds that are contrary to Islam. Ibrahim says the issue has been exaggerated out of all proportion by the Egyptian media. Investigations were only able to uncover one such fatwa, or religious edict, he said. Nevertheless, Ibrahim asked Egypt's Sunni Muslim authorities, including the prestigious al-Azhar mosque and university, to speak out. "They all said we have more than one fatwa saying that pharaonic monuments are not against Islam, or Islam is not against pharaonic monuments," Ibrahim said. "So now this case is closed."

RECOVERING STOLEN ARTEFACTS: Ibrahim has also been trying to recover artifacts stolen at the height of the uprising in 2011. The greatest losses were at the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square, where some 40 artifacts went missing. "We found about 15 objects, 29 artifacts are still missing," said Ibrahim. He takes pride in the fact that the museum housing King Tutankhamen’s treasures has been kept open through the spasms of turmoil since the revolt to "send a positive message". In an effort to draw back tourists, Ibrahim has reopened tombs and temples closed for years due to restoration. These include Sakkara’s sprawling underground Serapeum, the catacombs where mummified sacred bulls, or Apis, were buried. The Serapeum had been closed since the late 1990s.
Six tombs have also been reopened at Giza plateau, together with the Pyramid of Chephren, the second largest. He says the Grand Egyptian Museum being built near the Giza pyramids will be completed by August, 2015. In another initiative to boost visitor numbers, Ibrahim said the aviation ministry would soon open routes from Red Sea beach resorts to Luxor and Aswan. "This also might encourage them to go ... at least for a day," he said. In Luxor, home to the Valley of the Kings, Ibrahim laments hotel occupancy rates have slumped to 17 percent in the winter months that should mark the high season for cultural tourism. "Egypt is still safe and welcoming those who want to come here," said Ibrahim. "If you want to help us, the only thing we need from you is to come back."

February 15, 2013: Islamists Rally Against Violence In Egypt'

Thousands of Islamists protested in Cairo on Friday against violence that has marred anti-government demonstrations, showing support for President Mohamed Mursi, the Muslim Brotherhood politician elected head of state last year. The "Together against Violence" rally was called by a hardline Salafi Islamist group that waged an armed revolt against the state in the 1990s. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya, whose leadership renounced violence more than a decade ago, has entered mainstream politics since autocratic president Hosni Mubarak was overthrown in 2011. The Muslim Brotherhood and its Freedom and Justice Party said it backed Friday's rally in a symbolic way but did not mobilize supporters for the event, meaning the numbers were smaller than at previous Islamist protests. Around 60 people have been killed in Egypt since late January in unrest touched off by the anniversary of the uprising against Mubarak and exacerbated by a court ruling that sentenced 21 people to death over a soccer stadium disaster a year ago. It has been the worst bloodshed since Mursi assumed office, underlining the instability that continues to thwart government efforts to restore a sense of normalcy and revive an economy in crisis by attracting fresh investment and tourism. The unrest has been stirred by anger at Mursi and his Islamist backers, who the opposition says have betrayed the revolution and sought to monopolize power - accusations dismissed by the Muslim Brotherhood. Repeating the pattern of recent weeks, Mursi's opponents rallied again on Friday, this time gathering outside El-Quba, one of the presidential palaces in the northern suburbs of Cairo. The activists dubbed it "Checkmate Friday". The protesters numbered several hundred by early afternoon.

WARNING FROM CLERIC: Recent protests have routinely turned violent, with government buildings, police stations and the presidential palace
coming under fire from petrol bombs and rocks. But, "the person who came (to power) through ballot boxes will not leave by petrol bombs," said a cleric who led the crowd in Friday prayers as the rally got under way outside Cairo University. "He who came to power by direct, free choice will not leave by the rocks thrown by children." The crowd grew to several thousand after prayer. "No to Violence. Yes to sharia (Islamic law)," declared a banner held aloft from the crowd. "With our blood and souls we will sacrifice ourselves for Islam!" chanted the crowd. "The people want an iron fist," read another banner. Some people journeyed in from the provinces for the rally. At one point, the mother of Khaled al-Islambouli, one of the Islamists behind President Anwar Sadat's 1981 assassination, appeared on stage, drawing cheers as she waved to the crowd. "Mohamad Mursi is a legitimate leader who was elected by the will of the people," said Mohamad Omar, from Mansoura, north of the capital. He came on a bus chartered by al-Gama'a al-Islamiya. "The opposition's methods of violence, petrol bomb-throwing, igniting fires and causing destruction is not accepted by the Islamists," added Alaa Abdulwahab, a 45-year old who had traveled from Minya, a four-hour journey south of Cairo. Mursi's most prominent liberal and leftist opponents have distanced themselves from the violence, saying they support only peaceful agitation. Islamist leaders and their rivals all renounced violence at crisis talks on January 31 chaired by al-Azhar, a Sunni Muslim seat of religious learning. Islamist groups such as al-Gama'a al-Islamiya were repressed by Mubarak during his 30 years in power. But they have moved into the heart of public life since his fall, alarming secular-minded Egyptians who worry they aim to dominate the new Egypt.

February 15, 2013: Egypt Seizes Two Tons Of Explosives Bound For Sinai

Egypt seized two tons of explosives hidden in a truck carrying a shipment of fruits and vegetables bound for Sinai on Friday, security sources said. The country's security forces are trying to reassert control over the Sinai, which borders Israel and the Gaza Strip and has descended into lawlessness since the revolt that overthrew President Hosni Mubarak two years ago. "We found the amount in a shipment, concealed under some fruits and vegetables... We found the explosives packed inside 100 plastic bags," a security source said. In January, Egypt seized six anti-aircraft and anti-tank rockets in the Sinai peninsula that smugglers may have intended to send to the Hamas-ruled Gaza strip. The confiscated explosives were of a type used for demolishing stones in quarries. When interrogated, the truck driver said he was unaware he was transporting
explosives and that a businessman had asked him to take the goods to Sinai where it would be collected.

February 15, 2013: Islamist Work'

An Egyptian opposition activist said on Friday he had been abducted by men who threatened him over his anti-Islamist activities, tied his hands and scalded his back with hot water before dumping him in a remote area. Ibrahim Hanafi had been working with the Freedom Front for Peaceful Change, collecting evidence of what he saw as "violations" by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist movement that backs President Mohamed Mursi. "They blindfolded me and tied my hands behind my back ... They told me to stay away from the Muslim Brotherhood and politics and said that was a warning," Hanafi told Reuters. He said he had been abandoned with ripped clothes in a remote area outside Cairo. A Muslim Brotherhood spokesman said the group had nothing to do with the attack, or any involvement in other "indecent cases". A security source confirmed that Hanafi had been found beaten and tied up. Opposition activists say a number of campaigners have been attacked in recent months after criticizing the Islamist-led government that came in after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, who had repressed Islamist groups. Hanafi said he had been abducted on Thursday night. A fellow activist earlier said he had been taken four days ago, but Hanafi said he had been at home for part of that time with his phone switched off. Around 60 people have been killed since late January in unrest touched off by the second anniversary of the uprising, much of it the result of protests by those who accuse Mursi of hijacking the revolution and seeking to monopolize power. Mursi's supporters and opposition groups organized rival rallies.

February 15, 2013: Islamists Rally For Egypt's Mursi In Cairo'

Thousands of Islamists rallied in Cairo on Friday in support of Mohamed Mursi, the Muslim Brotherhood president who has been the target of protester rage in weeks of violent demonstrations. Repeating the pattern of recent weeks, Mursi's opponents rallied again on Friday, this time gathering outside El-Quba, one of the presidential palaces in the northern suburbs of Cairo. The activists dubbed it "Checkmate Friday". The protest, which drew several hundred people by afternoon descended into violence as night fell. State media reported that "troublemakers" had thrown rocks and petrol bombs. Security forces unleashed tear gas and water cannon, it said. The pro-Mursi rally was called by a hardline Salafi Islamist group, Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya, in what it described as a protest under the banner "Together Against Violence".
The group waged an armed insurrection against the state in the 1990s but its leadership renounced violence more than a decade ago. It has entered mainstream politics since autocratic president Hosni Mubarak was overthrown in 2011. The Muslim Brotherhood and its Freedom and Justice Party said it backed Friday's rally in a symbolic way but did not mobilize supporters for the event, meaning the numbers were smaller than at previous Islamist protests. Around 60 people have been killed in Egypt since late January in unrest touched off by the anniversary of the uprising against Mubarak and exacerbated by a court ruling that sentenced 21 people to death over a soccer stadium disaster a year ago. It has been the worst bloodshed since Mursi assumed office, underlining the instability that continues to thwart government efforts to restore a sense of normalcy and revive an economy in crisis by attracting fresh investment and tourism. The unrest has been stirred by anger at Mursi and his Islamist backers, who the opposition says have betrayed the revolution and sought to monopolize power - accusations dismissed by the Muslim Brotherhood. Recent protests have routinely turned violent, with government buildings, police stations and the presidential palace coming under fire from petrol bombs and rocks. Trouble also flared outside of Cairo on Friday. In al-Mahalla al-Kubra, an industrial town, protesters set fire to a local government building, state TV reported. In Alexandria, the security forces briefly fought protesters when they tried to force their way into a police station, witnesses said.

WARNING FROM CLERIC: The pro-Mursi rally in Cairo grew to several thousand after prayer. "The person who came (to power) through ballot boxes will not leave by petrol bombs," said a cleric who led the crowd in Friday prayers at the rally. "He who came to power by direct, free choice will not leave by the rocks thrown by children." "No to Violence. Yes to sharia (Islamic law)," declared a banner held aloft from the crowd. "With our blood and souls we will sacrifice ourselves for Islam!" chanted the crowd that assembled outside Cairo University. "The people want an iron fist," read another banner. Some people journeyed in from the provinces for the rally. At one point, the mother of Khaled al-Islamouli, one of the Islamists behind President Anwar Sadat's 1981 assassination, appeared on stage, drawing cheers as she waved to the throng. "Mohamad Mursi is a legitimate leader who was elected by the will of the people," said Mohamad Omar, from Mansoura north of the capital. He came on a bus chartered by al-Gama'a al-Islamiya. "The opposition's methods of violence, petrol bomb-throwing, igniting fires and causing destruction is not accepted by the Islamists," added Alaa Abdulwahab, a 45-year-old who had travelled from Minya, a four-hour journey south of Cairo. Mursi's
most prominent liberal and leftist opponents have distanced themselves from the violence, saying they support only peaceful agitation. Islamist leaders and their rivals all renounced violence at crisis talks on January 31 chaired by al-Azhar, a Sunni Muslim seat of religious learning. Islamist groups such as al-Gama’a al-Islamiya were repressed by Mubarak during his 30 years in power. But they have moved into the heart of public life since his fall, alarming secular-minded Egyptians who worry they aim to dominate the new Egypt.

February 15, 2013: Egyptian Says He Was Abducted For Anti-Islamist Work'

An Egyptian opposition activist said he had been abducted by men who threatened him over his anti-Islamist activities, tied his hands and scalded his back with hot water before dumping him in a remote area. Ibrahim Hanafi had been working with the Freedom Front for Peaceful Change, collecting evidence of what he saw as "violations" by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist movement that backs President Mohamed Mursi. "They blindfolded me and tied my hands behind my back ... They told me to stay away from the Muslim Brotherhood and politics and said that was a warning," Hanafi told Reuters. He said he had been abandoned with ripped clothes in a remote area outside Cairo.

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February 15, 2013: Egyptian Activist Found Beaten, Dumped Outside Cairo'

Updates: An Egyptian opposition activist was found beaten and tied up in the desert near Cairo on Friday, four days after he went missing from a protest demanding the removal of President Mohamed Mursi, a security
source and a fellow campaigner said. Ibrahim Hanafi, who was rescued and treated for bruises on his back, had been working with the Freedom Front for Peaceful Change, collecting evidence of what he saw as "violations" by Islamist politicians, said the group's general coordinator Essam El Sharif. "Our colleagues in the movement and the police found him tied to a tree, naked and bound with a letter that carries threats ... against anyone who talks (negatively) about the Brotherhood," he added, referring to the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood group that propelled Mursi to power. A Muslim Brotherhood spokesman said the group had nothing to do with Hanafi's beating, or any involvement in other "indecent cases".

Opposition groups say a number of campaigners have been attacked in recent months after criticizing the Islamist-led government that came in after the revolt that ended decades of rule by strongman Hosni Mubarak. Tensions have risen in Egypt in recent weeks with frequent clashes between riot police and protesters opposed to Mursi, who the opposition accuses of hijacking the revolt and seeking to monopolies power. Around 60 people have been killed since late January in unrest touched off by the anniversary of the uprising against Mubarak. Mursi's supporters and opposition groups organized rival rallies. A security source confirmed Hanafi had been found beaten and bound, but did not say whether he had been tied to a tree or mention the letter.

February 15, 2013: Top Egypt Archaeologist Sees Hope For Future In Past'

The keeper of Egypt's archaeological treasures sees hope for the nation's future in its pharaonic past. Mohammed Ibrahim, head of the antiquities ministry, likens Egypt's turbulent emergence from autocracy to the periods of decline that afflicted the nation on the Nile between the fall and rise of its three ancient kingdoms. "We have passed through similar periods like that, even in antiquity," said Ibrahim, custodian of the pyramids, tombs and temples that bear witness to one of the world's oldest civilizations. "Every time Egypt passes through this period, it recovers very quickly, very strongly."

But for now, Ibrahim's ministry, is suffering from the repercussions of unrest that has hit the economy hard, driving away the tourism which pays his ministry's bills. Excavation work led by the ministry has ground to a halt because of the financial squeeze. The unrest has also stopped many foreign-financed digs by deterring the archaeologists. But the 59-year old Egyptologist is upbeat: foreign archaeologists are starting to come back. And while the periods of decline between the ancient kingdoms could last 200 years, he expects Egypt to bounce back much
sooner this time around. "Egypt will be something new," he told Reuters in an interview at his offices in the medieval citadel that towers over the mosques of Cairo's Islamic quarter.

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that should mark the high season for cultural tourism. "Egypt is still safe and welcoming those who want to come here," said Ibrahim. "If you want to help us, the only thing we need from you is to come back."

February 16, 2013: Egypt's Political Rivals Meet Amid Tension'

Liberal and Islamist political leaders met privately on Saturday to try to ease tensions that have sparked protests in which some 60 Egyptians have died since late January, politicians said. The protests erupted after the second anniversary of the uprising which overthrew Hosni Mubarak and reflected competing visions for Egypt's future. Political turbulence has slowed negotiations for a $4.8 billion dollar loan from the International Monetary Fund. Politicians said Mohamed ElBaradei, a prominent liberal activist and leader of the National Salvation Front (NSF), met Saad el-Katatni, head of the Muslim Brotherhood's ruling Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). Another leader of the NSF, Sayed el-Badawi, also took part in the talks. Previously the NSF had boycotted the idea of talks with President Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood, who has been the target of protester rage in weeks of violent demonstrations.

February 16, 2013: Foreigners Arrested For Trying To Spread Christianity In Libya'

Four foreigners have been arrested in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi on suspicion of being Christian missionaries and printing books about Christianity, a security official said on Saturday. "They were arrested at a publishing house where they were printing thousands of books that called for conversion to Christianity," security official Hussein Bin Hmeid said. "Proselytizing is forbidden in Libya. We are a 100 percent Muslim country and this kind of action affects our national security." Hmeid said the government-affiliated security apparatus called the Preventative Security, for which he is a spokesman, had arrested an Egyptian, a South African, a Korean and a Swede who was travelling on a U.S. passport. "We are still holding interrogations and will hand them over to the Libyan intelligence authorities in a couple of days," Hmeid said, without giving further details. The Preventative Security apparatus is a parallel security body created during the 2011 war that ousted Muammar Gaddafi and made up of several rebel brigades which fought in the conflict. Libya's central government has yet to impose its authority on a myriad of armed groups who have yet to lay down their arms, and with skeletal national security forces, often relies on them for security.

February 17, 2013: Egypt Pound Will Not Collapse - Presidential Aide'
The Egyptian pound will not collapse and its incremental depreciation has stabilized, a senior aide to Islamist President Mohamed Mursi said on Sunday. Essam Haddad, Mursi's deputy chief of staff and foreign policy adviser, told Reuters in an interview that he did not expect the pound to fall further after it lost more than 8 percent against the dollar since the start of the year. "I think it has reached a level of stability," he said. "So as long as it (depreciation) is going incrementally and in a way that is market-sensitive, then there is no harm in this," Haddad said. More than two years of political instability following the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 has triggered a flight into dollars. The Egyptian pound has faced extra pressure since late last year, when violent protests against President Mohamed Mursi erupted, setting back hopes for economic recovery.

That violence was triggered by anger over the death sentences handed down to 21 people from Port Said for their involvement in a soccer stadium disaster in the city a year ago. Presidential adviser Haddad said of the Egyptian currency: "What we have to be very careful of is to (avoid) a drastic change, or a complete fall or collapse. And this is something we are not seeing in the foreseeable future and we hope that it will recover."

BLACK MARKET: A black market in hard currency has sprung up in recent weeks due to a shortage of dollars, with street traders "weighing the pound at more than 7 to the dollar compared to an official rate of 6.73. Regulated foreign exchange bureaus are swamped by demand for dollars and cannot meet the demand, the head of the foreign exchange department at the Chambers of Commerce said. A senior business leader affiliated with the ruling Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan Malek, told Reuters in an interview that people expected further devaluation of the pound. "I'm not, of course, a technical (expert) but people expect a little bit of devaluation in the future," he said when asked whether he expected a further depreciation of the currency to help exports and tourism. He said the economy was going through a very difficult period because the transition to democracy launched by the 2011 uprising that toppled former President Hosni Mubarak was not yet complete and institutions were not working fully. Asked about such concerns, Haddad said: "When the situation starts to stabilize more on the political side, I believe the Egyptian pound will be even stronger." There had been calls from the business community to change the exchange rate to boost the economy
by improving exports and making Egypt more attractive for foreign investors, and those changes had now occurred, he said.

"Market forces will act on this and decide what is the best value for the Egyptian pound," Haddad added. Egypt's central bank governor said late on Sunday he had no fears of dollarization and added the bank had reduced the amounts offered at its U.S. dollar auctions in order to set aside hard currency for imports of crucial goods. Foreign investors are eyeing Egyptian households' dollar holdings as a critical gauge of trust in the authorities. Investors are watching closely for evidence of a significant rise in ordinary Egyptians' dollar holdings. "I am not worried about dollarization," Hisham Ramez said in an interview with CBC channel late on Sunday. "Household dollarization is at far lower rates than those that would scare one," he said. In an attempt to control the rate of the pound's decline, Egypt's central bank introduced regular dollar auctions in December. Having initially offered sums of $75 million per auction, the bank has reduced the amounts sold. Last week it offered $40 million at each of its dollar sales. Reserves have fallen to $13.6 billion, less than the $15 billion needed to cover three months worth of imports. "Of course it's not something good, not something comfortable," Ramez said, adding he had taken steps to counter this such as prioritizing certain imports including foodstuffs, production machines and their spare parts, and fertilizers. He said speeding up measures to secure a $4.8 billion IMF loan Egypt has requested would help the reserves recover. "A lot of investors are waiting for this," said Ramez.

February 17, 2013: Egypt President's Son Drops Government Job After Furore'

One of Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi's sons withdrew from taking up a job with a firm affiliated to the civil aviation ministry on Sunday amid media accusations of nepotism.

The decision by Omar Mursi to forgo a human resources post at the Holding Company for Airports and Air Navigation showed the role of independent media in holding leaders to account in the new Egypt, following the uprising that toppled President Hosni Mubarak in 2011. Hosni Mubarak was widely believed to have been grooming his own son, Gamal, a businessman, to succeed him. Gamal and his brother Alaa are in jail awaiting trial on charges of corruption and illegal land dealings.

Sources at the ministry said the monthly salary for Omar Mursi's position would not have exceeded 900 Egyptian pounds ($130) but activists said it
was unfair for the president's son, who graduated last year, to be given a
government post when millions of citizens have been jobless for years.
Activists threatened on Sunday to protest outside the civil aviation
ministry if the president's son took up his post. On his Facebook page,
Omar Mursi wrote: "I took a test for the position knowing I would be
attacked and rumors and lies would be spread about me ... Yet I chose
not to complete the paperwork to take up this position. "The question
remains 'How can I find a job in my dear country Egypt?' he said.

February 17, 2013: Alcohol Sale To Be Banned In Egypt's New Suburbs'

Two years after the Egyptian revolution that ousted an authoritarian
regime, liberals are increasingly concerned that the ruling Islamists are
out to curb personal freedoms and build a society in their own image.
Alcohol, prohibited by most Islamic scholars, is one area where the new
authorities are introducing controversial change. Nabil Abbas, the vice
president of the New Urban Communities Authorities (NUCA), told Reuters
on Sunday that the government would no longer issue licenses for the sale
of alcohol in new residential settlements on the outskirts of Cairo,
Alexandria and other big cities. "NUCA has stopped renewing licenses to
sell alcohol but the current ones will continue until they expire," Abbas
said. "Representatives of the residents in new suburbs complained that
the sale of alcohol leads to problems including attacking women and
randomly ringing doorbells of people's homes." Egyptians opposed to the
country's Islamist leaders condemned the move as an infringement on
personal freedoms.

Dina Fahmy, a 30-year-old interior designer, said she did not believe that
safety was the reason behind the government's decision. "First this
Islamist government will ban alcohol in the new urban communities, then
slowly they will try to start banning it elsewhere and then God knows
what's next," Fahmy said. "I don't believe this move is driven by safety
reasons but rather by the leaders' attempt to impose their Islamist vision.
"This move is going to negatively affect tourism and annoy many
Egyptians as it signals the start of an assault on their personal freedoms
and choices." Islamist President Mohamed Mursi's government increased
taxes on alcoholic beverages in December but backed down after the
move was criticized. Earlier this month, an Egyptian court ordered the
suspension of online video service YouTube for a month for broadcasting a
film insulting the Prophet Mohammad. A satirical poster circulated online
on Sunday in response to the alcohol curb. It listed some of Egypt's main
problems including road accidents, police brutality and poverty then
showed a cartoon of Mursi dressed as Superman and saying "Must save Egypt from porn, alcohol and YouTube".

WORRIES IN TOURISM INDUSTRY: Though most mainstream Islamic scholars agree that Islam forbids alcohol outright, some have voiced different views. These include Saad El-Din Helaly, a professor of jurisprudence at Al-Azhar University and a member of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, who was among the contenders this month for the post of Grand Mufti, which carries wide influence over legislation and social affairs. On a popular television show last year, Helaly argued that only grape-based alcoholic beverages are forbidden as well as inebriation, but not drinking other kinds of alcohol in moderation. Karim Mohsen, managing director of tourism firm Sylvia Tours and board member of the Egyptian Travel Agents Association, said any moves to ban alcohol in hotels and restaurants could hurt Egypt's ailing tourism industry, hard hit by political turmoil. "The fear where tourism is concerned is not of banning alcohol stores. The fear is that alcohol would be banned from hotels which would impact foreign tourists, and in restaurants it could also impact Arab tourists," Mohsen said. "But the current move could also give a negative message to both final clients and decision-makers in tourism," he added.

February 17, 2013: Dollars Start Running Out For Egypt's Currency Bureaus'

Egypt's currency bureaus are being overwhelmed by demand for dollars amid a supply shortage fuelled by political crisis, the head of the foreign exchange department at the Chambers of Commerce said. Mohamed el-Abyad said foreign exchange offices can only supply 20 percent of the dollars for which they receive orders. "With the dollar shortage there is a semi-halting of our operations," he told Reuters in an interview. More than two years of political instability following the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 has triggered a flight into dollars and disrupted foreign investments. That has caused a devaluation of the local pound, which has dropped over 8 percent against the dollar in the past two months, and drained the country's foreign reserves. The currency crisis has also driven some dealers into the streets in search of people with dollars to sell, spawning a new black market. In an attempt to control the rate of the pound's decline, Egypt's central bank introduced a regular dollar auctions in December. Since then it has cut the amount of dollars it offers, to $40 million in its latest auction last week from an initial $75 million.

Abyad said the central bank's decrease in the amount of dollars offered is "due to the decline in their supply of dollars and not because the market
does not need it. " Egypt's foreign reserves fell to $13.6 billion at the end of January - below the key $15 billion level needed to cover three months of imports. They stood at $36 billion on the eve of the uprising against Mubarak. "The outflow of foreign investment and the flight of capital in fear of the situation in the country is what created the dollar crisis," Abyad added. Egypt is negotiating a $4.8 billion International Monetary Fund loan but talks have stalled pending a revision of the country's economic reform program. Prime Minister Hisham Kandil said last week the government had finished revising its program, and hoped the IMF team would return this month to resume loan talks. The chief IMF spokesman said he was unaware of the Fund receiving the revised program. "(...)There are no) clear or specific outlines of where we are going with the Egyptian economy," Abyad said.

February 17, 2013: Egypt Protesters Block Access To Port, Demand Justice'

Thousands of Egyptian protesters blocked access to the harbor and rallied outside state buildings in Port Said on Sunday to demand justice over the deaths of dozens of people killed in riots last month. That violence was triggered by anger over the death sentences handed down to 21 people from Port Said for their involvement in a soccer stadium disaster in the city a year ago in which more than 70 people were killed. Sunday's day of "civil disobedience" was called by hardcore soccer fans from Port Said's al-Masry, the club that had been playing a home match against Cairo's Al Ahly when the stadium disaster occurred in February 2012. Witnesses said around 3,000 people took part in the protest, demanding the death sentence for those responsible for the January 26 violence set off by a verdict read out in Cairo. "With our lives, with our blood, we will sacrifice ourselves to you martyrs: Either we avenge you or we die like you!" they chanted. "The disobedience will last for one day and could continue if the protesters' calls for the death sentence for the killers of martyrs are not granted," said Ahmad Mutwalli, a political activist in Port Said. The protesters also disrupted train services. But General Ahmed Najeeb, head of the General Authority of Port Said, said the protest had not affected shipping activity at the Mediterranean port. Port Said was one of three provinces near the Suez Canal where President Mohamed Mursi declared a 30-day state of emergency in response to last month's unrest.

February 17, 2013: Rise Of Islamists Frays Strategic UAE-Egyptian Relations'
Days before his overthrow, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak received a senior visitor from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), one of several Gulf monarchies long supportive of the most Arab populous country and its veteran strongman. What transpired between Mubarak and Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahayan is not known, beyond the fact that a letter from UAE ruler Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayyan was delivered. But the significance of the Feb. 8, 2011 visit was clear: It was a gesture of understanding and concern for a longtime friend who had been a trusted diplomatic ally for most Gulf Arabs, not least in their confrontation with non-Arab Iran. Fast forward to 2013 and the picture is starkly different. The UAE-Egyptian relationship has been strained by the regional spread of Islamist influence - Egypt now has an elected Islamist president - with implications not only for the two protagonists but all Arab states hit by the uprisings against dictators and dynasties that began two years ago. Poorer, densely populated Arab states like Egypt often look to Gulf states for investment and financing, as well as overseas work for their nationals, a need ever more acute with rulers under unprecedented pressure to produce jobs and services. The UAE, home to around 380,000 Egyptian expatriates and a major investor in Egypt, pledged $3 billion of aid to Cairo in 2011. But the funds have not yet been transferred, an Egyptian source familiar with the matter told Reuters, mainly due to the political instability in post-revolution Egypt. A break in relations between the Arab political heavyweight and the Gulf financial powerhouse would be unthinkable. But the unfamiliar chill in their dealings reflects an increasingly complicated relationship between these two groups of countries. Gulf states historically have sent aid and investment to less moneyed fellow Arabs, and in return have received diplomatic support and sometimes military protection. The UAE-Egypt spat "does have a huge bearing on the success of the Arab transitions", said Jane Kinninmont of the British think tank Chatham House.

HUGE ECONOMIC NEEDS: "Here you have a number of countries which are going through transitions but which have huge economic needs. The obvious place for them to look is the wealthy Gulf Arab countries." Arab countries received 62 percent of all Gulf aid from 1970 to 2008, according to a study by researchers Bessma Momani and Crystal Ennis in the Cambridge Review of International Affairs. For its part, the UAE needs to tread a careful line, analysts say. Aggravating Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood could also affect UAE relations with other countries, like Syria, where Islamists are playing a major role in the revolt against President Bashar al-Assad. And irking Egypt's new rulers could also push Cairo closer to Shi'ite Iran, arch-enemy of the Gulf Arabs. Gulf Sunni Muslim rulers
fear that, despite being a Sunni group itself, the Brotherhood is soft on Iran, unlike Mubarak. "The Emirates recognize that Egypt's centrality in Arab affairs is an important counter to Iran," said Frederic Wehrey, Middle East program senior associate at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think-tank. Gulf Arab states need a prosperous Egypt for a host of reasons, not least to protect their own investments. But history shows that financial help from the region sometimes reflects shifts in the diplomatic climate - even if governments insist their assistance is not political.

For example Jordan's ties with Gulf were hurt in 1990 when it refused to join an alliance against Iraq after it invaded Kuwait. Many Palestinians and Jordanians lost jobs in the Gulf where they enjoyed welfare state benefits as expatriate workers. There are implications, too, for Gulf Arab states. Most saw Mubarak's fall as the result of a U.S. decision to cast adrift an erstwhile ally and common adversary of Iran, rather than as an acceptance of an unstoppable revolution. Crucially, Gulf Arab rulers alarmed by Mubarak's ouster were further disconcerted by the subsequent ascent to power of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mubarak's sworn foe and a group once cited in a U.S. diplomatic cable as the UAE's "mortal enemy". If Washington was ready to deal with the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo, could it do the same in the Gulf, if a new democratic dispensation swept away the region's tradition of princely rule?

ANXIETY: There is no shortage of evidence of UAE worries about the reach of Islamists. On Jan. 27 the UAE announced 94 of its citizens would go on trial on charges of seeking to seize power, accusing them of being in communication with the Brotherhood. Many are believed to be members of al-Islah, an Islamist group suspected of links to the Brotherhood, a movement founded in Egypt in 1928 and which is banned in the Gulf Arab state. Islah says it has no connection to the global Brotherhood. Some analysts say the arrests are meant to send a message that Islamist activities will not be tolerated, rather than reflecting a belief they pose a significant security threat. "The UAE has a rule: zero tolerance for political organizations of any sort whether Islamists or non-Islamists, and these guys (Emiratis and Egyptians) broke the law. Pure and simple," UAE political scientist Abdelkhaleq Abdullah said. But the UAE has continued to strike a firm tone in public. In October, Sheikh Abdullah, the foreign minister, said: "The Muslim Brotherhood does not believe in the nation state. It does not believe in the sovereignty of the state." An Emirati source close to the government said the minister's comments were
directed at the Brotherhood, not Egypt, and the UAE saw the bilateral relationship as a strategic one.

On January 1, a local newspaper reported that the UAE had also arrested 11 Egyptians on suspicion of training Islamists in how to overthrow governments. The Brotherhood replied by saying the 11 were wrongfully arrested. Local media in the UAE said the Gulf Arab states had rejected a subsequent request by Cairo to free the detainees. For its part, the Brotherhood has sought to reassure Gulf Arabs it has no plan to push for political change beyond Egypt's borders. Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi has said there is no plan to "export the revolution" - comments welcomed by the UAE. Both Egypt and the UAE publicly assert that they have a special relationship. After all, Sheikh Abdullah had a meeting with Mursi, whose roots are in the Brotherhood, in Egypt in September 2012 and delivered an invitation for him to visit the UAE. A response is awaited.

PERIODS OF STRAIN: And yet the discordant tone will stir questions over Gulf Arab willingness to make good on promises of support to Egypt, which desperately needs funds to avert financial crisis. While Gulf Arabs have pledged large sums to Egypt, helping stabilize its currency, they are motivated by their own interests, Richard LeBaron, a former U.S. ambassador to Kuwait, wrote in a study for the Atlantic Council think-tank. He said most Gulf Arab states, wary of the Brotherhood, had adopted a "wait and see" attitude toward new leaders in Egypt and Tunisia before committing significant additional funds and seemed not to sense any urgency in making such decisions. Carnegie Endowment's Wehrey wrote that while UAE-Egypt ties could face more turbulence, matters could be resolved due to shared interests including a need to counter Iranian influence and the Brotherhood's need for Gulf investment. "A key first step is for both sides to avoid strident and provocative statements that fuel the rancor that currently afflicts the relationship," he said.

February 17, 2013: Egypt Chief Of Staff Says Army Will Avoid Politics'

Egypt's armed forces, for decades at the center of power, will avoid involvement in politics but could have a role if things became "complicated", the chief of staff said. It also expects rival political groups to solve disputes by dialogue, Major General Sedki Sobhi told Reuters The military ran Egypt for six decades from the end of the colonial era and through an interim period after the overthrow of former air force chief and president Hosni Mubarak two years ago. About 60 people have been killed since late January in protests that erupted after the second anniversary of the uprising. Speaking to Reuters at an industry event in Abu Dhabi, said
that in a week or 15 days some kind of national dialogue would take shape between the ruling Muslim Brotherhood and opposition groups. The army would not back any political party, he said. "We are not political, we don't want to participate in the political situation because we suffered a lot because of this in the last six months," he said. "But sometimes we can help in this problem, we can play this role if the situation became more complicated," he said without elaborating. Diplomats and analysts suggest the army, fearful of further damaging a reputation that took a beating during a messy transition period when it was in charge, would only act if Egypt faced unrest on the scale of the revolt that toppled Mubarak.

Protests and violence now are nowhere near that stage. Sobhi's remarks were less categorical than those of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the army chief, who said on January 29 that unrest was pushing the state to the brink of collapse and the army would remain the "solid and cohesive block" on which the state rests. In recent months, opposition groups have criticized Islamist President Mohammed Mursi's perceived drift towards authoritarianism, which they say fuelled this year's unrest. The instability has provoked unease in Western capitals, where officials worry about the direction of a powerful regional player that has a peace deal with Israel. Asked about security in Egypt, Sobhi downplayed violence during protests earlier this month. "We cannot say it is a very serious or very dangerous," he said. Liberal and Islamist political leaders met privately on Saturday to try to ease the latest tensions. Politicians said Mohamed ElBaradei, a prominent liberal activist and leader of the National Salvation Front (NSF), met Saad el-Katatni, head of the Muslim Brotherhood's ruling Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). Another leader of the NSF, Sayed el-Badawi, also took part in the talks. Previously the NSF had boycotted the idea of talks with President Mursi of the Brotherhood, who has been the target of protester rage in weeks of violent demonstrations.

February 18, 2013: As Vote Nears, Tensions Flare Among Egypt Islamists' President Mohamed Mursi's decision to fire a hardline Islamist as an adviser has laid bare rivalries between Egypt's two biggest Islamist groups as parliamentary elections approach. The sacking of Khaled Alameddin of the Salafi Nour Party on Sunday has led his movement to step up criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood that propelled Mursi to power, narrowing the already slim chances of the two movements working together in the election. Alameddin broke down in tears during a news conference on Monday, saying he had been accused of abusing power. The presidency has yet to issue a statement on why Alameddin was dismissed. "I formally demand an apology from the president. I won't accept an apology less
than that," Alameddin said. Another of Mursi's advisers from the Nour Party, Bassam El-Zarka, announced his resignation at the news conference, apparently in solidarity with Alameddin. The Nour Party, which emerged from the ultra-conservative religious movement Daawa Salafiya, came second to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt's last parliamentary elections, the results of which were overturned by a court ruling last June. New elections are due to begin in April or May. Since the last legislative vote, the two movements have both cooperated and clashed. Nour backed a Brotherhood rival, Abdel Moneim Abol Fotouh, in the first round of the presidential election. But it swung behind Mursi in the second-round run-off against Ahmed Shafik, Mubarak's last prime minister. Mursi employed several Nour Party members as advisers. The groups cooperated to drive through an Islamist-tinged constitution approved in a December referendum, deepening a national divide between Islamists and their opponents.

WIDENING DIFFERENCES: But in recent weeks the Nour Party has sought to distance itself from the Brotherhood, whose popularity has been dented by a deepening economic crisis and a stand-off with political rivals who say it wants to monopolies the institutions of state. The Nour Party did not take part in a pro-Mursi rally called last Friday by another hardline Islamist party. "The Brotherhood has become more radioactive from the Nour Party's standpoint now," said Shadi Hamid, director of research at the Brookings Doha Center. "They (Nour) want to present themselves as the pure Islamic alternative." Nour has sought to defuse tension between Mursi's presidency and Egypt's liberal and leftist opposition, an apparent attempt to burnish its image as a responsible, mature political player. The Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) has poured cold water on the initiative. The FJP, which won about 40 percent of seats in the last elections, said last week it aimed to secure an outright majority in the next parliament. Nour Party spokesman Nader Bakkar said Alameddin had been dismissed without proper investigation, and took a stab at Mursi over accusations that his family had recently benefited from connections by securing state employment for one of his sons. A media furor over the appointment of Omar Mursi at a firm affiliated to the civil aviation ministry forced him to forgo the job on Sunday. Hamid at the Brookings Doha Center said there was no "natural affinity" between the two Islamist groups. "There has always been a tense relationship," he said.

February 18, 2013: Egypt Flooded Tunnels To Cut Gaza Arms Flow -aide'
Egypt will not tolerate a two-way flow of smuggled arms with the Gaza Strip that is destabilizing its Sinai peninsula, a senior aide to its Islamist president said, explaining why Egyptian forces flooded sub-border tunnels last week. The network of tunnels has been a lifeline for some 1.7 million Palestinians in Gaza, bringing in an estimated 30 percent of all goods that reach the enclave and circumventing a blockade imposed by Israel for more than seven years. But Essam Haddad, national security adviser to President Mohamed Mursi told Reuters in an interview: "We don't want to see these tunnels used for illegal ways of smuggling either people or weapons that can really harm Egyptian security." He said that under a deal brokered by Cairo to end fighting in November between Israel and the Hamas movement that rules the Gaza Strip, the Israeli stranglehold on the coastal territory had been considerably relaxed. Egypt has eased border controls to allow in construction materials, notably from Qatar.

"Now we can say that the borders are open to a good extent - it could still be improved - and the needs of the Gazan people are allowed in. Building materials are allowed in for the first time," Haddad said. "And on the other side, we would not like to see arms smuggled through these tunnels either in or out, because we are now seeing in Sinai and we have captured actually across Egypt heavy arms that could be used in a very dangerous way." Sixteen Egyptian border guards were killed last August in a militant attack in Sinai near the Gaza fence that shocked Egyptians and highlighted lawlessness in the desert region adjoining Israel and the Gaza Strip. Cairo said some of those gunmen had crossed into Egypt via the Gaza tunnels - an accusation denied by the Palestinians. Dozens of tunnels have been destroyed since that incident. Egypt said it had seized two tons of explosives hidden in a truck carrying a shipment of fruit and vegetables bound for Sinai. In January, Egypt seized six anti-aircraft and anti-tank rockets in the peninsula that smugglers may have intended to send to Gaza.

WEAPONS SMUGGLING INCREASED: Despite the flooding of the tunnels, which sparked bitter complaints from Palestinians, Haddad said relations with Hamas, ideologically close to the Muslim Brotherhood movement now ruling in Cairo, were good. Egypt has been trying, so far without success, to coax Hamas and the Fatah nationalist movement that runs the Palestinian Authority which controls the West Bank to agree on a national unity government and elections. But Haddad made clear that President Mohamed Mursi would scrupulously respect Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel, and that daily cooperation with the Jewish state continued as normal, even though there were no contacts at a presidential level.
An Israeli security delegation visited Cairo for talks last week and two Israeli warships passed through the Suez Canal, one flying the Star of David flag for the first time in years. Asked whether he saw a threat to Egyptian security from al Qaeda Islamist militants, Haddad said a structured al Qaeda network with its connections and operations did not exist in Egypt. But its extremist ideology knew no borders. "Everybody has noticed that since the collapse of (former Libyan leader Muammar) Gaddafi's army, the amount of weapons smuggling across the whole region has really increased dramatically," he said. "This is something that is really alarming because you don't know who will be getting these arms. And when you see there are anti-aircraft missiles inside Egypt and anti-tank weapons inside Egypt ... you will question who is doing this and why. "That is why we want to strengthen our western border," Haddad said, adding that this was the government's top security priority now. Egyptian security authorities are still investigating whether a militant cell arrested in Cairo this month had links to an al Qaeda network.

February 18, 2013: Masked Men Fire On Egyptian Lawmaker's Car In Theft Attempt'

Masked men opened fire on an Egyptian lawmaker's vehicle in an attempted carjacking, a security source and state media said on Monday, days after a similar attack on the central bank governor's car. Many Egyptians complain of a breakdown in security in the two years since a popular uprising ended former President Hosni Mubarak's decades-long rule, and of a spike in crimes such as robbery and sexual assault. Four unidentified men shot at the car of Osama Fekry, a member of the hardline Islamist Nour Party, state news agency MENA reported. A security source told Reuters the attack happened as Fekry was driving from Cairo to his hometown in the Nile Delta. Three bullets hit the car, a BMW, but Fekry was not wounded, the source added. A Nour Party official said he could not immediately comment on the attack which happened late on Sunday. Islamist President Mohamed Mursi has struggled to restore security since he was elected in June. About 60 people were killed in a wave of violent street protests between Jan. 25, the second anniversary of the uprising's start, and Feb. 4. Armed men attacked the car of Egypt's central bank governor, killing a guard, wounding the driver and stealing the vehicle. The governor, Hisham Ramez, was not in the car at the time.

February 18, 2013: Egypt's Constitutional Court Rejects Election Law, May Delay Poll'
Egypt's constitutional court rejected five articles of a draft election law on Monday and sent the text back to the country's temporary legislature for redrafting in a ruling that may delay a parliamentary poll due in April. "The court has returned the draft parliamentary electoral law to the Shura Council after making five observations on five articles which it found unconstitutional," a statement said. The court said the election law was technically flawed and contradicted articles in the new constitution which the Shura council members themselves had drawn up. The five articles the court highlighted involved limits on lawmakers' political affiliations, the ability of lawmakers to change their status from professionals to peasants, provisions for Egyptians to vote abroad and the division of constituencies.

The statement said the technical problems pertained to "the wording of the law" and "contradictions within the law". "The report by the constitutional court on the electoral law reveals the level of professional weakness of the Shura council and the haste in which the new constitution was drawn up," said politician and former member of parliament Mostafa Naggar. The liberal Wafd Party said "the Muslim Brotherhood has violated the constitution it drew up" and the Social Democratic Party hailed the constitutional court's statement.

A source in President Mohamed Mursi's office said before the decision that if the court found fault with the law, it could delay its passage, and hence the election, by a couple of weeks, but probably not months. Mursi had been expected to promulgate the electoral law by Feb. 25 and set a date two months later for voting, probably in more than one stage for different regions because of a shortage of judicial poll supervisors. The constitutional court, made up partly of judges from ousted former President Hosni Mubarak's era, has intervened repeatedly in the transition, dissolving the Islamist-dominated parliament elected after the 2011 pro-democracy uprising. Its composition was changed by the new constitution passed by a referendum in December. The Freedom and Justice Party said it respected the court's decision, saying in a statement that prior scrutiny of the law was a guarantee of "the stability of the legislative institutions, and spared the country the negative affects of the dissolution of representative councils". Mursi was criticized in October for issuing a decree giving himself powers to override the judiciary. He backed down and dropped the decree weeks later following widespread protests.

February 19, 2013: Egypt Announces Big Fuel Price Rises For Some Industries'
Egypt's government announced new fuel prices for many sectors of the economy on Tuesday which industry sources said were 50 percent higher than previous levels, triggering protests by factory owners affected by the increase. Several hundred people employed in the brick manufacturing industry - one of the sectors affected - blocked roads in Cairo and Minya, south of the capital, to protest at the price rises, a security source said.

With the economy in crisis, the Egyptian government is under pressure to rein in a deficit enlarged by energy subsidies that account for a fifth of the budget. The government must curb the subsidies to secure a vital $4.8 billion International Monetary Fund loan, economists say. In the official gazette the government said the price of fuel oil, which is widely used in energy-intensive local industries, would be 1,500 Egyptian pounds ($220) per ton. This would apply for all industries other than bakeries, electricity producers and food manufacturers to be named by the ministry of industry. Government's announcement gave no comparative figure or say when the new prices would come into effect, but industry sources said they had been raised from 1,000 pounds previously.

Prices of locally-produced natural gas, fuel oil and diesel for manufacturers of cement and bricks were also raised by 50 percent, the industry sources said. As part of moves to cut subsidy spending, the government plans to start rationing subsidized gasoline through a system of smart cards at the beginning of July, the minister of petroleum said on Monday. The final ratification of the IMF loan was postponed in December at Egypt's behest because of political unrest. Since then, the country's reserves of foreign exchange have fallen to $13.6 billion, below the $15 billion level required to cover three months' worth of imports, and the currency has fallen by 8 percent against the U.S. dollar to a record low. ($1 = 6.7316 Egyptian pounds)

February 19, 2013: Protests Paralyze Factories In Suez Canal City'

Thousands of Egyptian workers joined a protest wave in Port Said on Tuesday, paralyzing factory production in the Suez Canal city despite President Mohamed Mursi's efforts to soothe unrest by acting to restore its free port status. Witnesses said at least 10,000 people took part in the third day of demonstrations to demand justice for dozens of people killed during rioting in the Mediterranean port last month. The head of the Suez Canal Authority said movements on the canal - an artery for global shipping and one of Egypt's biggest foreign currency earners - were unaffected by the protests in Port Said, which lies at the waterway's northern entrance. Port Said was one of three provinces near the canal
where Mursi declared a 30-day state of emergency after last month's unrest, which was linked to soccer violence but reflected wider economic discontent with the Islamist government in Cairo.

"The regime is provoking the people of Port Said and not tending to their demands. We will not retreat from civil disobedience and will continue to escalate matters day after day," said Amani El Elaidy, one of the protesters. Unrest flared in Port Said after death sentences were given to 21 fans of its al-Masry soccer club for involvement in a stadium disaster a year ago when more than 70 people died.

Day of "civil disobedience", called by hardcore al-Masry supporters, had a much greater impact on the local economy than the previous two days. Factory production was halted in the city's investment zone and schools were empty, with many teachers and students joining the protests. The protesters called for the appointment of a neutral judge to investigate the deaths of around 40 people in Port Said last month. They also demanded the removal of Port Said's governor and Egypt's interior minister. On the evening Mursi presented a draft law to the Shura Council - Egypt's temporary legislature - to reinstate Port Said's free trade zone and allot 400 million Egyptian pounds ($60 million) annually from the Suez Canal's revenues to develop cities along the waterway. The Council agreed to this, state television said on Tuesday, but the move fell short of the city's demands. "Port Said's streets are boiling because of President Mohamed Mursi's neglect ... Mursi does not consider Port Said to be on Egypt's map," said another protestor, Mohamed Said.

Egypt set up the duty-free trade zone in the 1970s. However, former president Hosni Mubarak - toppled by an uprising two years ago - decided to phase out its privileges more than a decade ago, damaging the local economy. Al-Masry fans also prevented thousands of workers commuting from neighboring cities including Ismailia and Sharkia from getting to factories in the Port Said investment zone.

February 19, 2013: Egypt Files New Charges Against Hosni Mubarak's Last Premier'

Egypt's public prosecutor has filed new criminal charges against the last prime minister of ousted President Hosni Mubarak over alleged illegal real estate sales, judicial sources said on Tuesday. The charges against Ahmed Shafik, who was also the defeated run-off candidate in Egypt's first free presidential election last year, relate to deals struck in 2005. Shafik, who fled to the United Arab Emirates after losing to Islamist President
Mohamed Mursi, was appointed prime minister shortly before Mubarak was overthrown two years ago. The new charges against Shafik include illegally selling and profiting from the sale of villas belonging to the Airforce Officers' Association, as well as money laundering, the sources said.

The prosecutor also referred charges against Shafik's three daughters to a criminal court in Cairo as the heirs of their mother, Shafik's late wife. Dozens of legal cases have been opened against Mubarak's associates since he stood down on February 11, 2011 during mass protests. The prosecutors earlier filed charges against Shafik in September last year. The court has yet to set a date for his trial but the prosecutor has asked a judge to call on the UAE authorities to return Shafik to Egypt. Egypt's MENA state news agency reported on Tuesday that 10 other members of the Airforce Officers' Association had also been referred to the court for alleged involvement in embezzlement. Last year a judge ordered that Shafik be detained on his return to Egypt to face accusations of illegally allocating 40,000 square meters of land to Mubarak's two sons Alaa and Gamal.

February 19, 2013: Egypt In Political Clinch As Economic Cliff Looms'

Analysis: Two years after a pro-democracy uprising, Egypt resembles a rickety bus rolling towards a cliff, its passengers too busy feuding over blame to wrench the steering wheel to safety. Foreign exchange reserves are dwindling. Tourism is moribund. Investment is at a standstill. Subsidized diesel fuel and fertilizer are in short supply, while the cost of subsidies is swelling the budget deficit unsustainably. The Egyptian pound has lost 14 percent of its value since the 2011 revolt. Dollars are scarce. An IMF loan that could unlock wider aid is on hold. Unemployment is rising. Public security has deteriorated, and arms smuggling is rife.

With little regard for the looming economic cliff, politicians in the most populous Arab nation are trading blows over an Islamist-tilted constitution, political violence and an alleged power grab by the Muslim Brotherhood. To President Mohamed Mursi and his supporters in the Freedom and Justice Party, the Brotherhood's political arm, this is just a tough home stretch in Egypt's delayed transition to democracy. With the strongest national machine, they confidently expect to win parliamentary elections in April or May, completing their conquest of the new democratic institutions, then set about reforming the country along conservative Islamic lines. "We are going through a bottleneck," said Essam Haddad, the president's national security adviser. "We'd like to get through this
bottleneck as quickly as possible, and without cracking the bottle." Cash injections from Qatar, the Brotherhood’s main foreign backer, are holding the country’s head just above water, and Haddad says a big informal economy will keep Egypt going.

IMF LOAN UNSURE: Others are less sure. U.S. ambassador Anne Patterson warned this month that the dearth of foreign currency could cause food and fuel shortages and put social stability at risk in a country where two-fifths of the population lives on less than $2 a day. Contacts with the International Monetary Fund continue by telephone and email, but there is no sign of an IMF mission returning to Egypt to conclude a $4.8 billion loan agreement vital to stabilize the economy. The IMF demanded in December that Egypt amend its economic adjustment program to qualify for the loan. Diplomats say an IMF deal could unlock up to $12 billion in funding from a range of sources including the World Bank, the European Union, the United States and Gulf Arab countries. Haddad made clear the government would not risk implementing before polling day the unpopular subsidy cuts and austerity measures required by the global lender. "It is very well known by the IMF that nobody would do such an action just before the elections," he said. "However, our message is very clear. These reforms are essential for the economic recovery. There is no other choice."

Some liberal opposition leaders, who have failed to pressure Mursi into amending disputed articles in the constitution or replacing a weak cabinet led by pale Prime Minister Hisham Kandil with a national unity government, are now offering a pact on a platform of economic priorities. Hassan Malek, the Muslim Brotherhood’s top business leader, played down that idea, saying opposition politicians Mohamed ElBaradei, a former U.N. nuclear agency chief, and Amr Moussa, a former head of the Arab League, were only speaking for themselves and could not deliver their National Salvation Front. The leftist Popular Current party of Nasserite firebrand Hamdeen Sabahi, a key member of the NSF, and hard-line Islamist Salafi parties have distanced themselves from the IMF program. Malek said in an interview the economy was going through a sticky patch because the transition to democracy launched by the 2011 revolt that toppled former President Hosni Mubarak was not yet complete and institutions were not working fully. "The Egyptian economy is not going to collapse," he said. Malek is trying to lure home Egyptian billionaires and Mubarak-era economic reformers, some of whom had their assets seized or were convicted in absentia after the uprising.
"BROTHERHOODISATION" DENIED: The opposition intelligentsia in Cairo and young street activists who spearheaded the anti-Mubarak uprising and feel their revolution has been confiscated, denounce what they call a growing "Brotherhoodization" - a drive to infiltrate and control all institutions. In one example, veteran al-Ahram journalist Hani Shukrallah, a respected commentator, blamed Brotherhood pressure on the government-owned media group for his enforced retirement. The paper's new management denied political motives. Yet there is little sign of any monopolization of state power or civil society so far. It looks more like the kind of rotation of elites that occurred in Turkey when the mildly Islamist AK party won election a decade ago. The armed forces and to some extent the Interior Ministry and security services remain autonomous power centers that appear to have reached a modus vivendi with Mursi based on mutual non-interference rather than being under his thumb.

A vibrant independent media forced the president's son this week to forgo a job with a state-affiliated company by raising accusations of nepotism. Shrill late-night television talk-shows offer a wide range of trenchant opinion. The judiciary is still full of Mubarak-era holdovers who show little inclination to do the Brotherhood's bidding. Neither the government nor opposition parties control the young street. And a clumsy effort to gain more sway over the religious authorities failed last week when senior Muslim scholars picked an apolitical Islamic lawyer as Egypt's top cleric in preference to the Brotherhood's preferred candidate. Haddad said any talk of Brotherhoodization was "black propaganda trying to exclude a whole sector of society". He noted that Brotherhood members had been excluded from many state institutions and the armed forces under Mubarak.

Ziad Bahaa el-Din, a former investment authority chief who is now vice-president of the opposition Social Democratic party, says the Brotherhood, like past Egyptian rulers, is trying to secure its grip on power before tackling the country's problems. "This has happened ever since (Ottoman pasha) Muhammad Ali slaughtered the Mamluks in the early 19th century," he said in an interview. "(Gamal Abdel) Nasser locked up the Muslim Brothers and the Communists in 1954. (Anwar) Sadat locked up his opponents in 1971. "The difference now is that people's acceptance is no longer there. You cannot control public opinion, and the kind of economic problems we are facing cannot be postponed for a couple of years," he added. Dan Kurzer, a former U.S. ambassador to Cairo now teaching at Princeton University, said Egypt was only in "round three of a 15-round heavyweight contest". Among the players in the ring, he sees the Brotherhood, the military, the internal security forces, the
revolutionary street, and what he called "the fourth heavyweight - old regime loyalists who may be off balance, in jail or in exile but who will be energized if the economy collapses".

February 20, 2013: Egypt Tries To Lure Back Exiled Businessmen'

Egypt's government allowed convicted businessmen who fled the country since a popular uprising to negotiate an end to corruption charges from abroad, an attempt to lure them home to help revive a stricken economy. Numerous wealthy businessmen have left Egypt since President Hosni Mubarak was overthrown in 2011 to avoid being jailed for corrupt dealings during the veteran leader's three decades in power. With them went large sums of money that the government now needs desperately to shore up an economy shattered by two years of political turmoil and social unrest.

Several figures from the political and business elite with close ties to the Mubarak family have been tried and convicted in absentia of making private gain from the sale of public property or graft-tainted state contracts. Among them were Hussein Salem, who was convicted in absentia in 2011 to seven years in jail and fined more than $4 billion for money laundering and profiteering. The government said on Wednesday it had amended a law to offer arbitration via an intermediary in Egypt to investors targeted by criminal proceedings. The law had previously required the investor to attend arbitration in Egypt. "It means that those with final court verdicts issued against them and have fled abroad can go through reconciliation and return the money ... without having to stand in court or be put in jail," said Achraf Chazly, a corporate lawyer. "This is driven by a desperate need for money... They want to encourage these people to return and re-invigorate the economy," he said.

A stand-off between President Mohamed Mursi's allies in the Muslim Brotherhood and their secular and liberal opponents has scotched hopes that a drought in investment will end soon. The local currency has tumbled 8 percent against the dollar this year as Egypt's international reserves fell to $13.6 billion, less than the $15 billion needed to cover three months' worth of imports. The reserves had stood at $36 billion on the eve of the uprising against Mubarak. Cairo-based political analyst Elijah Zarwan said the government's attempt to entice back exiled businessmen was "growing out of perceived economic necessity, given the parlous state of the country's finances, and also the perceived political necessity - a fear that wealthy businessmen who are close to the old regime might foment problems at home".
Hassan Malek, chairman of the Egypt Business Development Association and a senior informal adviser to Mursi, told Reuters on Sunday he had been involved in efforts to persuade wealthy Egyptians to return and invest in the country, though he said court cases should be solved first. Under the amendment agreed on Wednesday, reconciliation would lead to the cancellation of jail sentences and unlock the investors' frozen assets. It added a "clause stipulating that in the case of a court verdict issued in absentia convicting (someone), it is possible to take measures to re-examine the case". This would be at "the request of, and in the presence of, a special defender of the investor". The result of reconciliation would be "cancellation of the order to arrest and jail him, and ending the ban on dispensing and managing their assets, and dropping the criminal case for the investor".

February 20, 2013: Egypt Govt Offers Convicted Investors "Reconciliation"

The Egyptian government moved on Wednesday to entice back convicted investors who have fled the country, offering them arbitration that could overturn verdicts issued in absentia and that may lead to "full reconciliation". With the country deep in economic crisis, the move signals that Egypt may be seeking to draw on the finances and expertise of exiled business leaders associated with ousted president Hosni Mubarak. In a statement, the government said such a reconciliation would lead to the cancellation of jail sentences and unlock the investors' frozen assets. The cabinet have agreed to amend a law related to investor guarantees and incentives, it said. This would add a "clause stipulating that in the case of a court verdict issued in absentia convicting (someone), it is possible to take measures to re-examine the case". This would be at "the request of, and in the presence of a special defender of the investor". The result of reconciliation would be "cancellation of the order to arrest and jail him, and ending the ban on dispensing and managing their assets, and dropping the criminal case for the investor". It said it did not extend to co-defendants in the case and that they "would not benefit from it".

February 20, 2013: Egypt Court Allows Policemen To Grow Islamic Beards'

An Egyptian court ruled on that policemen may grow beards, ending a decades-old convention barring them from making what is often seen here as a display of Islamic piety.

Dozens of police officers were suspended from work in February for breaking the de facto ban on beards introduced under deposed President Hosni Mubarak. They had protested outside the Interior Ministry, calling
on Islamist President Mohamed Mursi - who is bearded himself - to secure their reinstatement. Cairo's High Administrative Court rejected a request by the Interior Ministry to let it suspend officers who defied the unwritten rule. "The court ruled ... that police officers have the right to grow beards," judge Maher Abu el-Enin said. Hosni Mubarak used the police to crush Islamist groups he saw as enemies of the state. During his rule, sporting any kind of beard precluded Egyptians from holding senior government posts. The decision backed a similar ruling by a lower court and the decision makes the verdict final. The Interior Ministry's spokesman was not immediately available to comment. Men across Egyptian society wear beards, including many leftists, but the pressure for ending the police ban came from religious officers who wish to emulate the Prophet Mohammad. Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood, the state's most organized Islamist movement, has come to power through elections since the popular uprising that toppled Mubarak in February 2011. The ruling is expected to raise worries among minority Christians, liberal-minded Muslims and others who fear that emboldened Islamists will try to force their beliefs and customs on society. Mursi said during his campaign for the presidency that he had no objection to members of the security forces growing beards.

February 20, 2013: Egypt State Grain Buyer Steps Aside As Currency Reserves Fall'

One of the most powerful figures on the global wheat market, Nomani, said on Wednesday he has left his job as vice chairman of Egypt's state grains buyer GASC, at a time when the country is struggling with falling foreign currency reserves. For more than three years he has overseen strategic buying for the world's biggest importer of wheat, and the government stressed on Wednesday that the country had ample stocks for production of bread, the national staple. "I got promoted to become an adviser to the minister of trade and supplies, which means that I will no longer handle the wheat bidding and buying process, starting now," Nomani told Reuters. For a profile of Nomani, see Nomani said Mamdouh Abdel Fattah had taken over as acting deputy head of the GASC (General Authority for Supply Commodities) for a period of one year, but it was not yet clear if this was renewable or not. Egypt's foreign currency reserves have fallen to $13.6 billion, less than the $15 billion needed to cover three months' worth of imports. In an attempt to control the rate of a drop in the Egyptian pound's value, the central bank introduced regular dollar auctions in December. The Egyptian economy has been hit by more than two years of turmoil since the popular uprising that swept Hosni Mubarak
from power in February 2011. The unrest has driven away tourists and investors. Central bank governor Hisham Ramez said this week that he had taken steps to prioritize certain imports including foodstuffs, production machines and their spare parts, and fertilizers. The cabinet said that Egypt already had stocks of wheat to last 101 days and this would rise to 126 days as more imports arrive. GASC set a tender to buy an unspecified amount of wheat from global suppliers for April 10-20 shipment.

February 21, 2013: Egyptian Presidential Decree'

Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi on called parliamentary elections beginning April 27 and ending in June, according to a presidential decree. The new parliament will convene on July 6, the decree said.

February 21, 2013: Egypt's Mursi Calls Elections Beginning April 27'

President Mohamed Mursi on Thursday called parliamentary elections that will begin on April 27 and finish in late June, a four-stage vote that the Islamist leader hopes will conclude Egypt's turbulent transition to democracy. The vote will take place in a country deeply divided between Islamist parties that have come out on top in all elections held since Hosni Mubarak was ousted in 2011 and more secular-minded opposition parties that have struggled to get organized. The Islamist-led administration hopes the election of the new parliament will help stabilize Egypt so an economy in deep crisis can start to recover from spasms of unrest and violence that have dogged the transition. The new parliament will convene on July 6, according to a decree issued by Mursi. The Shura Council, the upper house of parliament, earlier adopted an electoral law that cleared the way for Mursi to set the date for the lower house election. Under the new Egyptian constitution adopted in December, Mursi must secure parliament’s approval for his choice of prime minister, giving the chamber more power than it had under Mubarak, when it was no more than a rubber stamp.

With Egypt so polarized, the stakes are high for the Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. The party has said it will seek an outright majority in the vote, an outcome that would allow Mursi administration to press ahead with its plans for a country caught in political limbo despite the Islamist victory in last year's presidential vote. Opposition groups have accused Mursi and the Brotherhood of seeking to dominate the post-Mubarak order, accusations denied by the Islamists but which have fuelled protests against his rule. The opposition must now
decide whether to take part in the vote and try to gain a foothold in Egypt's elected institutions or boycott in an attempt to deny legitimacy to the process, analysts said. "This confronts them with a real dilemma," said Nathan Brown, professor of political science at George Washington University and an Egypt expert. "If you have a majority that is very sympathetic to the president, then the president can do an awful lot," said Brown. "If you have a parliament that is fractured, you could have a system of infighting and even gridlock."

IMF AGREEMENT: The Mursi government is seeking to revive Egypt's stagnant economy with a $4.8 billion loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund. But approval of an IMF deal and the austerity measures it would imply could hit the Brotherhood's popularity ahead of the elections. Each stage of the vote will comprise an initial two days of voting, with a further two days of voting slated for run-offs for closely contested seats. Mohamed Gadallah, a legal adviser to Mursi, had earlier said the voting would begin on April 28. The vote would be held in phases in different regions because of a shortage of poll supervisors. The last lower house election, which was won by Islamists, lasted from late November 2011 until January the following year. Mursi had been expected to ratify the electoral law by February 25. The lower house was dissolved last year after the court ruled the original law used to elect it was unfair.

On Monday the Constitutional Court demanded changes to five articles of the revised electoral law. The Shura Council accepted this ruling and adopted the legislation without a vote on Thursday. "The decision of the Constitutional Court is binding and we have no right to vote on it. It must be carried out," said Ahmed Fahmy, the Council's speaker. The new law bars members of parliament from changing their political affiliation once elected. Under ousted president Hosni Mubarak, independents were often cajoled into joining the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), which monopolized parliament and political life before the 2011 revolution. The law also stipulates that one third of the lower house should be designated for independents and bans former members of the now-defunct NDP from participating in politics for at least 10 years.

February 21, 2013: Egypt To Seek IMF Talks As It Reveals Grim Economy Data'

Egypt plans to invite an IMF mission to Cairo within a week, the government said on Thursday, flagging an early resumption of negotiations for a $4.8 billion loan as it struggles with an acute foreign currency shortage. Planning Minister Ashraf al-Araby said foreign
investment had all but dried up, predicted a huge budget deficit as food and fuel subsidy bills soar, and announced data also underlining the depth of Egypt's crisis before elections expected in spring. Araby said growth had been just 2.2 percent year-on-year in the December quarter, noting that strong investment was needed to reach seven percent - an annual rate economists see as needed to soak up the waves of young people entering the labor market. He also predicted the budget deficit could hit 10 percent of annual economic output in the financial year to June, a level Egypt cannot afford without outside help. "The Egyptian economy is recovering extremely slowly due to the security and political situation," Araby's ministry said in a statement. Analysts had expected the government of President Mohamed Mursi to try to delay a deal with the International Monetary Fund until after the parliamentary elections, as the loan's terms will demand highly unpopular austerity measures.

However, Araby predicted rapid movement. "God willing, we expect to invite the IMF delegation within days," he told a news conference. Asked to be more specific, he said: "Within days, no more than a week." Egypt's upper house of parliament adopted a revised electoral law on Thursday, clearing the way for Mursi to call the lower house polls expected to be held in April or May. Egyptians are angry as the crisis drags ever more of them into poverty. Cairo reached an initial agreement with the IMF on the loan in November but postponed ratification the next month due to violence on the streets. This followed Mursi's move to expand his powers and push through a new constitution seen by opponents as favoring his backers in the Muslim Brotherhood and more hardline parties. Araby announced foreign investment in Egypt was dire in the six months to the end of December - the first half of Egypt's financial year. "We had almost an absence of new direct foreign investments during the first half of the year," he said.

POUND HAS TUMBLED VERSUS DOLLAR: Egypt's pound has tumbled 8 percent against the dollar this year as its international reserves fell to $13.6 billion, less than the $15 billion needed to cover just three months' imports. This drop has inflated the budget deficit by forcing up the cost of subsidizing energy and food staples, such as bread. The government announced new fuel prices for many sectors of the economy on Tuesday which industry sources said were 50 percent higher than previous levels, drawing protests by factory owners affected by the increase. Private industry and individuals are struggling to borrow or get access to dwindling supplies of dollars. Mahdi Ibrahim, who runs an import-export business with Brazil, expressed anger about problems in getting hold of
even relatively small sums in dollars - difficulties which are forcing businesses to turn to the black market for funds. "I have pulled all my money out of the bank because of the restrictions on my ability as a client to buy dollars or transfer hard currency abroad. I have business to take care of abroad," he told Reuters

February 21, 2013: Egypt's Mursi To Call April Election - presidential Source'

Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi will call a parliamentary election starting in April, a presidential source told Reuters, saying the vote would be held in three or four stages. Earlier in the day the Shura Council, the upper house of parliament, adopted an electoral law as amended by the Constitutional Court, clearing the way for Mursi to set a date for the lower house election. "The president will issue a decree soon, it could be tonight, calling for elections to start in April," the source told Reuters. The vote would be held in phases in different regions because of a shortage of poll supervisors. The last lower house election, which was won by Islamists, lasted from late November 2011 until January the following year. Mursi had been expected to ratify the electoral law by Feb. 25. The lower house was dissolved last year after the court ruled the original law used to elect it was unfair. (Reporting by Yasmine Saleh and Marwa Awad: Writing by Marwa Awad: Editing by David Stamp and Mark Heinrich)

February 21, 2013: Egypt Election To Begin April 28: Presidential Adviser'

Egyptian parliamentary elections will begin on April 28 and be held in four stages, Mohamed Gadallah, a legal adviser to President Mohamed Mursi, told Reuters. "Parliamentary elections for 2013 will begin on April 28, over four stages," presidential adviser Mohamed Gadallah said.

February 21, 2013: Egypt Passes Electoral Law, Paves Way For Elections'

Egypt's Shura Council, the upper house of parliament, adopted on Thursday an electoral law as amended by the Constitutional Court, clearing the way for President Mohamed Mursi to set a date for lower house elections. Mursi is expected to ratify the electoral law by Feb. 25 and announce voting will be held in about two months' time to choose the lower house, which was dissolved last year after the court ruled the original law used to elect it was unfair. The new chamber is likely to have to decide on tough economic measures that the International Monetary Fund is demanding in return for a $4.8 billion loan which Egypt needs to tackle an economic crisis. The Constitutional Court demanded changes to
The Shura Council accepted this ruling and adopted the legislation without a vote. "The decision of the Constitutional Court is binding and we have no right to vote on it. It must be carried out," said Ahmed Fahmy, the Council's speaker. The new law bars members of parliament from changing their political affiliation once they are elected. Under ousted president Hosni Mubarak, independents were often cajoled into joining the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), which monopolized parliament and political life before the 2011 revolution. The law also stipulates that one third of the lower house should be designated for independents and bans former members of the now defunct NDP from participating in politics for at least 10 years. Elections will probably be held in more than one stage in different regions because of a shortage of poll supervisors.

February 21, 2013: Egyptian Author Questioned For Contempt Of Religion'

Egyptian prosecutors have questioned an award-winning novelist over accusations he insulted religion, in the latest of a series of cases to cause concern over freedom of expression in Islamist-run Egypt. Writer Youssef Ziedan said he had been interrogated for four hours this week about his 2009 novel "Arab Theology", which has become a best seller since it was republished recently. The prosecutors were examining a three-year-old report from the Islamic Research Centre, a state-sponsored body of religious scholars, which said Ziedan had offended followers of Islam, Christianity and Judaism alike. Ziedan asked why the authorities are investigating "Arab Theology", which discusses the origins of religious violence, while Egypt faces major political, social and economic problems. "It was really shocking and strange to find myself talking about philosophy with state security officers, especially now at a time the state is suffering from extreme turmoil and street violence which should be the focus of their work," Ziedan told Reuters after his interrogation.

Egyptian law prohibits insults against Islam, Christianity and Judaism, laying down penalties of up to five years in jail. Egypt has a large Christian minority but its historic Jewish community has dwindled to almost nothing in recent decades. The law has long been on the books but was enforced only occasionally under deposed President Hosni Mubarak. However, campaigners have raised concerns about freedom of thought and expression under President Mohamed Mursi, an Islamist elected last year after the 2011 uprising that toppled Mubarak. Ziedan, a Muslim known for discussing non-traditional religious ideas in his novels, said he was questioned by the state security prosecutor in a case brought by
public prosecutor Talaat Ibrahim. Mursi appointed Ibrahim in November after sacking the previous incumbent, a Mubarak-era official. The opposition has accused Mursi of defying a law that prevents the firing of public prosecutors. Some judges and public figures saw the move as an attempt by the Muslim Brotherhood, which supports Mursi, to control the judiciary. Brotherhood spokesman Yasser Mehraz said his group had nothing to do with the Ziedan investigation. "Generally speaking, we at the Brotherhood believe that different ideas should exist and ideas should be fought only by ideas," he said.

"FLEXING THEIR MUSCLES": Human rights activist Gamal Eid said the "Arab Theology" case had been revived by a Salafi - one of those who want Egypt to follow a yet stricter interpretation of Islam than the Brotherhood favors. "The Islamic Research Centre's report was made in 2010 but a hardline Salafi Islamist person recently sent it to the (prosecution) officials," said Eid, who sent an aide to the interrogation. "Of course the case shows the continuation of Islamists' flexing their muscles and their attempts to shape the country according to their own form of Islam."

"Arab Theology" appeared at the end of 2009 and was recently reprinted. So far it has sold about 40,000 copies, far above average sales of books in Egypt of 4,000 to 6,000 at best. "The Islamic Research Centre's report also accused me of inciting strife in society and ... of mocking religions and spreading radical thoughts," said Ziedan. "I admit that my ideas are against all radical Islamist groups, which include the Brotherhood," he said, but added: "The book is entirely philosophical and anti-violence." His work "Azazeel" (Beelzebub) won the 2009 International Prize for Arabic Fiction, backed by the Booker Prize Foundation. However, some Christians said the book insulted their religion. Prosecutors also questioned Ziedan about that book before the revolution, but took no further action. Such cases have increased since Islamists gained power last year. In December, a 27-year-old Egyptian Christian was jailed for three years for posting online an anti-Islam film that ignited Muslim protests around the world. In November, seven Egyptian Christians living abroad were sentenced to death in absentia for participating in the video. A court sentenced Egyptian comic actor Adel Imam, renowned across the Arab world, to three months in jail and a fine of 1,000 Egyptian pounds ($150) in April for insulting Islam in his films and plays. Imam was acquitted on appeal. Ziedan said such cases, including his own, were a sign of the times. "I see the case, like many other former ones against writers and
creative people, as a form of pressure that has become a trend in the Brotherhood's world."

February 21, 2013: Egyptian Planning Minister Announces'

Foreign investment in Egypt was almost non-existent in the six months to the end of December, Planning Minister Ashraf al-Araby said on Thursday, illustrating the depth of the economic crisis facing the Arab world's most populous nation. He added that the country needed strong investment to reach the 7 percent annual economic growth rate commonly cited by economists as the level needed to lower unemployment and soak up new entrants to the labor market. Growth was only 2.2 percent year-on-year in the three months to the end of December, he told a news conference.

February 21, 2013: An opposition leader called for election boycott’

An opposition leader called for Egyptians to boycott elections due to start in April, saying the process under Islamist President Mohamed Mursi would be "an act of deception". Islamists, who have won every election since the 2011 overthrow of autocrat Hosni Mubarak, dismissed any suggestion that the parliamentary polls would lack credibility and predicted a strong turnout. While divisions between the Islamists and opposition remain deep, Mursi appeared ready to soothe anger among the Christian minority over the election schedule. The speaker of Egypt's upper house said Mursi would change the dates to avoid Coptic Christians having to vote during their Easter celebrations. Mursi called the lower house elections on Thursday, aiming to conclude Egypt's turbulent transition to democracy. However, liberal politician Mohamed El-Baradei drew comparisons with the last parliamentary polls to be held under Mubarak in 2010, a vote which was widely seen as rigged.

ElBaradei, a former U.N. nuclear agency chief, noted he had called for a boycott in 2010 "to expose sham democracy". "Today I repeat my call, (I) will not be part of an act of deception," he said on his Twitter account. The Muslim Brotherhood, which backs Mursi, rejected any call to boycott the voting which has been scheduled in four stages from April 27 to June. Essam Erian, a senior member of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, said the polls would be carried out under "complete judicial supervision" as well as being followed by Egyptian, regional and international media. Voting would be monitored by Egyptian and foreign civil society and human rights organizations, he said on his Facebook page, adding that he expected wide participation.
COPTIC ANGER: Egyptian elections have been supervised by judges since the revolution. The relatively small numbers of judges have required the drawn-out process, allowing them to oversee voting in different regions on different days. The opposition says Mursi should not have called the elections until a number of disputes had been settled, chiefly a new constitution produced by an Islamist-dominated assembly which contributed to serious street violence last year. Mursi's announcement of the dates drew fire from Coptic Christians, who make up about 10 percent of the population, as the schedule would interfere with their Easter festival. Ahmed Fahmy, the speaker of the Shura Council, said Mursi would respond to these worries. "The president answered the requests of the Coptic members and will issue a statement changing the dates of the elections," he told lawmakers. The state news agency MENA "ed a presidential aide as saying a statement on new dates would be issued "within hours". Islamists have used well-organized campaign operations to win every election since the revolution, while the liberal and leftist opposition has been beset by divisions. Previous opposition boycott threats have failed to materialize. The National Salvation Front (NSF), which groups a number of parties opposed to the Islamists including ElBaradei's, is due to decide in the coming week whether to join a boycott. "This is Dr. ElBaradei's own position and own opinion," said NSF spokesman Khaled Dawood, but he added that other NSF leaders were sympathetic to the idea of a boycott. "This is yet another individual move by the Muslim Brotherhood and President Mursi, establishing facts on the ground and then asking you to basically go with the rules of the game they've set on their own," he said.

February 22, 2013: Divided Egypt Opposition Attacks Mursi On Election Call'

Egypt's opposition attacked President Mohammed Mursi on Friday for calling elections during a national crisis, but face a test of unity in challenging Islamists who have won every poll since the 2011 revolution. No sooner had Mursi called the parliamentary polls on Thursday than liberals and leftists accused him of deepening divisions between Islamists and their opponents. Some threatened to boycott voting which starts on April 27th and finishes in late June. Voting is held in stages due to a shortage of election monitors and Mursi's choice of dates upset the Christian minority, which makes up about 10 percent of the population. AlKalema, a Christian Coptic group, criticized the presidency for setting the first round to fall on the community's Easter religious holiday. "This is total negligence of the Coptic community but an intentional move to
exclude them from political life," AlKalema said in a statement. Egyptian tycoon Naguib Sawiris made similar statements criticizing the vote timing. Egypt's state TV Channel One and Nile TV said later in separate scrolling news headlines that the presidency would change the date of the parliamentary vote because it falls on Coptic Easter holidays, in an effort to appease the Coptic minority. But no official statement was issued by the presidency to that effect.

Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood which backs Mursi, dominated the old lower house, which was dissolved last year by court order. The new parliament will face tough decisions as Egypt is seeking an IMF loan deal which would ease its financial crisis but demand unpopular austerity. Mursi called the elections, to be held in four stages around the country, hoping they can conclude Egypt's turbulent transition to democracy which began with the overthrow of autocrat Hosni Mubarak by popular protests. Islamists hailed elections as the only way out of Egypt's political and economic crisis. However, liberal politician Mohamed ElBaradei said holding polls without reaching a national consensus would further "inflame the situation". "The insistence on polarization, exclusion and oppression along with ... the deteriorating economic and security situation will lead us to the abyss," ElBaradei, a former United Nations agency chief, said on his Twitter feed. Egypt is split between the Islamists, who want national life to observe religion more closely, and opposition groups which hold a wide variety of visions for the future. Across Egypt there were scattered protests in Alexandria and Port Said, while a demonstration in Cairo's Tahrir Square was muted as a sandstorm enveloped the capital. Like the fractious opposition, the demonstrators had widely varying demands. Some called on Mursi to step down while others pressed for the military, which long backed Mubarak and his predecessors, to step back in to run Egypt.

BOYCOTT DECISION: The National Salvation Front (NSF), which groups a number of parties opposed to the Islamists, said it would hammer out its stand on the elections. "We will meet early next week to decide on whether we will boycott or go ahead with elections. But as you can see, the opposition overall is upset over this unilateral decision on part of the presidency. This was a rushed decision," said NSF spokesman Khaled Dawood. Dawood said Egypt should have other priorities such as changing the controversial new constitution produced last year by an assembly dominated by Islamists. "Solve these issues first then talk about elections," added Dawood. While the opposition can agree on attacking Mursi, previous boycott threats have fizzled out. It remains fractured and
disorganized, unlike the well-financed and efficient Islamist election machines which have triumphed in votes for the presidency and parliament. "We face a difficult political decision and time is running out. The opposition faces a test of its ability to remain united," said Amr Hamzawy, a professor of politics at Cairo University and former liberal lawmaker.

ISLAMISTS READY FOR VOTE: Islamist parties and groups welcomed the new elections and dismissed the boycott threat. "Elections are the only way out of the crisis. The people must be able to choose those they see fit. The majority of political forces will not boycott the elections," said Tarek al-Zumor of the Building and Development Party. Essam Erian, member of the Muslim Brotherhood's ruling Freedom and Justice Party, said parliament would unite Egypt's political life. "The coming parliament will hold a variety of national voices: Islamist, conservative, liberal and leftist. Everyone realizes the importance of the coming period and withholding one's vote is a big mistake," Erian said on his Facebook page. Islamists are likely to form coalitions and dominate the new parliament as they did in the previous short-lived lower house, which was dissolved after the Constitutional Court struck down the law used to elect it.

February 23, 2013: Egypt Parliament Election Start Moved To April 22

Egypt's parliamentary elections, previously scheduled to begin on April 27, have been brought forward to start on April 22, the presidential spokesman said on his Facebook page on Saturday. Egypt's parliamentary elections, previously scheduled to begin on April 27, have been brought forward to start on April 22, the presidential spokesman said on his Facebook page on Saturday. Members of Egypt's Coptic Christian minority had criticized the planned timing of the elections because some voting would take place during their Easter holiday.

February 23, 2013: Speaker'

Egypt's President Mohamed Mursi will modify the dates of upcoming parliamentary elections after requests from Christian lawmakers to change them, the speaker of parliament's upper house said on Saturday. Egypt’s President Mohamed Mursi will modify the dates of upcoming parliamentary elections after requests from Christian lawmakers to change them, the speaker of parliament's upper house said on Saturday. Members of the Coptic Christian minority had objected to the election dates Mursi announced on Thursday, as some voting would be held during their Easter celebrations. "The president answered the requests of the Coptic members
February 23, 2013: Egypt Brings Forward Election Start To Defuse Christian Row’

Egypt brought forward the start of parliamentary elections to April 22 on Saturday to defuse a row with the Christian minority, who said the original schedule would conflict with their Easter celebrations. Egypt brought forward the start of parliamentary elections to April 22 on Saturday to defuse a row with the Christian minority, who said the original schedule would conflict with their Easter celebrations. This should satisfy Coptic Christians, who make up 10 percent of the population. But the rift between Egypt's ruling Islamists and the opposition remained as deep as ever, with one leading liberal politician, Mohamed ElBaradei, saying he would boycott the polls.

The decision by Islamist President Mohamed Mursi to start the four-stage vote five days earlier than scheduled was announced by his spokesman on Facebook. Islamists, who have won every election since the 2011 overthrow of autocrat Hosni Mubarak, dismissed any suggestion that the parliamentary polls would lack credibility and predicted a strong turnout. Mursi called the lower house elections on Thursday, aiming to conclude Egypt's turbulent transition to democracy. However, ElBaradei, a former U.N. nuclear agency chief, drew comparisons with the last parliamentary polls to be held under Mubarak in 2010, a vote which was widely seen as rigged. ElBaradei noted he had called for a boycott in 2010 "to expose sham democracy". "Today I repeat my call, (I) will not be part of an act of deception," he said on his Twitter account. ElBaradei boycotted the presidential election that brought Mursi to power last June. The Muslim Brotherhood, which backs Mursi, rejected any call to boycott the voting which has been scheduled in four stages from April 27 to June. Essam Erian, a senior member of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, said the polls would be carried out under "complete judicial supervision" as well as being followed by Egyptian, regional and international media. Voting would be monitored by Egyptian and foreign civil society and human rights organizations, he said on his Facebook page, adding that he expected wide participation.

DRAWN-OUT PROCESS: Egyptian elections have been supervised by judges since the revolution. The relatively small numbers of judges have required the drawn-out process, allowing them to oversee voting in
different regions on different days. Under the new schedule, voting will be completed on June 24, with the new lower house due to meet on July 2. It aims to avoid making Copts vote during the most important festival of the Christian calendar. The opposition says Mursi should not have called the elections until a number of disputes had been settled, chiefly a new constitution produced by an Islamist-dominated assembly which contributed to serious street violence last year. Islamists have used well-organized campaign operations to win every election since the revolution, while the liberal and leftist opposition has been beset by divisions. Previous opposition boycott threats have failed to materialize. The National Salvation Front (NSF), which groups a number of parties opposed to the Islamists including ElBaradei's, is due to decide in the coming week whether to join a boycott. "This is Dr. ElBaradei's own position and own opinion," said NSF spokesman Khaled Dawood, but he added that other NSF leaders were sympathetic to the idea of a boycott. "This is yet another individual move by the Muslim Brotherhood and President Mursi, establishing facts on the ground and then asking you to basically go with the rules of the game they've set on their own," he said. (Additional reporting by Ahmed Tolba and Ali Abdelatti: Writing by David Stamp: Editing by Rosalind Russell and Stephen Powell)

February 24, 2013: Egypt Seeks Tourism Boost After Iran's Ahmadinejad Visit'

Egypt's tourism minister is heading to Tehran, the government said on Sunday, as Cairo tries to halt sliding visitor numbers and thaws relations with Iran after a 30-year freeze.

Minister Hisham Zaazou will visit the Iranian capital from Monday under a drive "to restore tourism activity into Egypt and discover new and diverse markets", the Tourism Ministry said in a statement. Last month President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the first Iranian leader to visit Egypt since Tehran's 1979 Islamic revolution, and called for a strategic alliance with Cairo. Egypt's tourism sector has suffered since a popular uprising toppled president Hosni Mubarak in 2011. Waves of riots and instability have driven many tourists away. Tourism used to account for more than a tenth of Egypt's gross domestic product (GDP) before the uprising. In 2010, around 14.7 million visitors came to Egypt, generating around $12.5 billion, but this slumped to 9.8 million people in 2011, bringing in $8.8 billion.

February 24, 2013: Ten Chadian Soldiers Killed In Northern Mali'
Ten Chadian soldiers were killed in operations targeting al Qaeda-linked Islamist rebels along northern Mali’s mountainous border with Algeria, Chad's army said on Sunday. The Chadian troops were carrying out operations in an area of the Adrar des Ifoghas mountains where 13 Chadian soldiers and 65 al Qaeda-linked rebels were killed in clashes on Friday. "In the course of the clean-up operations, the bodies of 28 other terrorists were found in the combat zone ... Ten more of our soldiers fell," said a statement from the army general staff read on state radio. "The final toll from the clashes ... and clean-up that followed is as follows: 93 terrorists ... on the side of the enemy. We deplore the deaths of 23 soldiers and 30 wounded," the statement said.

February 24, 2013: Egypt's Mursi Invites Opposition To Dialogue On Elections’

Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi invited opposition parties to a meeting to discuss concerns about upcoming parliamentary elections, which some parties have threatened to boycott, and agree on ways to ensure their fairness. The invitation was similar to offers Mursi has made previously that were spurned, and the National Salvation Front opposition coalition immediately rejected the offer to meet. "I tell everyone of all colors of the spectrum, to all dear brothers in different parties across Egypt, I approach them by name, by party, by persons to sit tomorrow and put down guarantees for transparent and fair elections," Mursi said in a recorded appearance on a television talk program on Mehwar channel aired late on Sunday.

Mursi also sought to dispel speculation that there were growing tensions between the army and the presidency. Some Egyptians, frustrated with what they view as Mursi's poor performance over the past seven months, have called for the military again to run Egypt. Egypt's military has been a central force in politics since army officers staged an overthrow of the monarchy in 1952. "There could never be disagreement between the armed forces and the presidency because the president and the armed forces are not two factions, they are one, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces is extremely professional," Mursi said on the show. In addition, Mursi said he has a strong relationship with the intelligence apparatus. "The General Intelligence is directly subject to the presidency of the republic, subject to me...I support, trust, protect and love them, and wish them well because through them Egypt's security is protected internally and externally," he said. Egypt brought forward by five days the start of the elections to April 22 to defuse a dispute with the Christian
community, which makes up a tenth of the population, after they said the original schedule would conflict with their Easter celebrations.

TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY: Mohammed Mursi said the elections could conclude Egypt's turbulent transition to democracy, which began two years ago with the overthrow of autocrat Hosni Mubarak by popular protests. Various opposition groups have said they would boycott the legislative elections, a move that could delegitimize the electoral process, which is due to take place in four stages and culminate with the sitting of the new lower house of parliament in July. The opposition has said that by deciding to hold elections Mursi and his Muslim Brotherhood movement trivialized the deaths of around 60 people in anti-government protests since January and was only concerned with securing parliamentary seats. They accused the Brotherhood of seeking to dominate all state institutions and said the electoral constituencies were "tailor-made" for the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and that there were no real guarantees of fair elections.

The National Salvation Front (NSF), which groups a number of parties opposed to the Islamists, is due to decide in the coming week whether to join the boycott as a movement. But it immediately rebuffed Mursi's call for a dialogue on elections. "It makes me angry. You take the decision (to hold elections) and then say, 'Come to talk to me','" Khaled Dawoud, an NSF spokesman, told Reuters. Some of the NSF's main parties have individually said they would boycott, including the Dostour party of Mohamed ElBaradei, a former U.N. nuclear agency chief. He drew comparisons with the last parliamentary polls to be held under Mubarak in 2010, a vote that was widely seen as rigged. Mursi's television comments were aired almost seven hours later than the time the presidency had announced and well past midnight, which provoked dismissive reactions from opponents. Bassem Youssef, a popular satirist who lampoons public figures, wrote on Twitter: "Has anyone seen Mohammed Mursi?" A joke from political activists that made the rounds on social networking sites ran: "According to which timing is the program being aired? Egypt's, Qatar's or the United States?" referring to the United States' and Qatar's foreign policies, seen as backing the Brotherhood.

February 25, 2013: Egypt Balloon Crash Kills 19, Mostly Foreign Tourists’

At least 19 people, most of them Asian and European tourists, died on Tuesday when a hot air balloon caught fire and crashed near the ancient Egyptian town of Luxor after a mid-air gas explosion, officials said. The balloon came down in farmland a few kilometers (miles) from the Valley of
the Kings and pharaonic temples popular with tourists. Rescue workers gathered the dead from the field where the charred remains of the balloon, gas canisters and other pieces of wreckage landed. One Egyptian was also killed, Health Minister Mohamed Mostafa Hamed told Reuters, listing the other victims as tourists from Japan, China, France, Britain and Hungary. Earlier, officials had said all the dead were foreigners.

The balloon crashed on the west bank of the Nile river, where many of the area's major historical sites are located. Konny Matthews, assistant manager of Luxor's Al Moudira hotel, said she heard an explosion at about 7 a.m. (0500 GMT). "It was a huge bang. It was a frightening bang, even though it was several kilometers away from the hotel," she said by phone. "Some of my employees said that their homes were shaking." Ahmed Aboud, head of an association representing Luxor balloon operators, said the fire had begun in the pipe linking the gas canisters to the burner. He said it was an accident. The deaths were caused by burns and injuries sustained in the fall, said Mohamed Mustafa, a doctor at the hospital where the injured were treated. The pilot survived by jumping from the basket, Aboud said. The British government said two British citizens and a British resident of Egypt had been killed. "We can also confirm that one other British national was involved and is in a stable condition," a British foreign ministry statement said. Two French citizens were killed, according to France's foreign ministry. The Japanese embassy in Cairo said it believed four Japanese had been aboard and had sent staff to Luxor to confirm this. Transport accidents are frequent in Egypt. Dozens of children were killed in November when the bus they were on collided with a train. Accidents affecting foreign tourists are rarer, but not unusual. Five Germans were killed in December in a bus crash near a Red Sea resort.

A LOUD EXPLOSION: U.S. photographer Christopher Michel, who was on board another balloon, told Britain's Sky News television that the balloon was one of eight flying at the time. "We heard a loud explosion behind us. I looked back and saw lots of smoke. It wasn't immediately clear that it was a balloon," he said. Hot air ballooning at dawn is popular with tourists, who are a mainstay of the Egyptian economy, although visitor numbers have fallen sharply since a 2011 uprising that toppled President Hosni Mubarak. Two years of political instability have kept many foreign tourists away. Tourism accounted for more than a 10th of Egypt's gross domestic product before the revolt. In 2010, about 14.7 million visitors came to Egypt, but this slumped to 9.8 million the next year. Wael Ibrahim, head of the tour guides' syndicate in Luxor, said he did not expect the accident to make the situation worse for tour operators in the
area than it already was. "We've already been affected badly in Egypt," he said. Some tourists may be more wary of activities like hot air ballooning, he said, but added: "This (type of) accident could happen anywhere in the world." Last year a balloon plunged to the ground in flames in Slovenia, killing four people and injuring 28. Egyptian Civil Aviation Minister Wael el-Maadawi said a committee from the ministry was heading to Luxor to investigate the incident. He said hot air balloon flights would be stopped until an investigation into the cause of the accident. "We cannot say whether this was because of maintenance or human (error) until the investigation committee is completely done with its investigation," he told Al Jazeera TV's Egyptian channel.

February 26, 2013: Finance Minister Speaks

Egypt plans to send a revised economic reform plan to parliament within two days and to the International Monetary Fund immediately after that, Finance Minister Al-Mursi Hegazy said. "As soon as the laws are sent to parliament, they will be sent (to the IMF)," he told reporters. Asked when Egypt planned to invite an IMF delegation to resume talks on a $4.8 billion loan, Hegazy said: "I think within 10 days to two weeks."

February 26, 2013: Egypt To Send Economic Plan To Parliament In Days-

minister’

Egypt will send a new economic plan needed to secure a lifeline from the International Monetary Fund to parliament within two days after releasing a summary that makes no mention of cutting subsidies and other politically-sensitive measures. Cairo is trying to secure a $4.8 billion IMF loan to shore up its finances as the economy faces a deep crisis rooted in two years of political turmoil that have drained foreign currency reserves to a critical level.

The turmoil has driven away foreign investors and tourists who are a major source of the foreign currency Egypt needs to import fuel and wheat. Finance Minister Al-Mursi Hegazy told reporters a revised economic reform plan would be sent to the parliament within two days, and then to the IMF immediately afterwards. "As soon as the laws are sent to parliament, they will be sent (to the IMF)," he told reporters, adding he expected a response from the IMF within about 10 days to two weeks after the plan was sent to them.

Asked when Egypt planned to invite an IMF delegation to resume talks on the loan, Hegazy said: "I think within 10 days to two weeks." The Fund
and Egypt agreed on the loan in principle in November, but ratification was suspended at Cairo's behest in December after Mursi announced and then suspended tax increases that drew heavy criticism from the opposition. A summary of the revised plan released by the government on Monday called for a levy on stock market transactions and a flat 25 percent tax on Egyptian companies, but did not spell out plans for cutting subsidy spending or detail other tax increases. The government aims to raise 450 million Egyptian pounds ($66.8 million) a year from the stock exchange tax, Hani Qadri, Egypt's deputy minister of finance said at a press conference.

SUBSIDIES: A fifth of the state budget goes on energy subsidies alone, but cutting them is widely unpopular, making it a sensitive issue ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled to start in April. As part of its plan to cut fuel subsidies, the government raised prices for fuel oil by 50 percent last week for some industries. It also plans to implement a "a system for subsidized fuel in July and hopes energy use in the country to be at cost price within three years. Investment Minister Osama Saleh said Egypt would reopen talks with the IMF next month. Egypt's foreign currency reserves tumbled to $13.6 billion in January from $36 billion before Mubarak was overthrown in February 2011. The Egyptian pound has fallen over 8 percent since the central bank started auctioning dollars at the end of December. The government is targeting a deficit for this financial year of 189.7 billion Egyptian pounds ($28 billion), or 10.9 percent of total economic output.

February 26, 2013: Leading Egyptian Leftist Party To Boycott Elections’

Egyptian leftist opposition party, the Popular Current, led by former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahy, said on Tuesday it will boycott parliamentary elections due to start in April as well as national dialogue talks proposed by President Mohamed Mursi. "We will neither participate in the national dialogue nor in the elections," Heba Yassin, a spokesman for the party told Reuters. "This is to protest against the elections law that we did not participate in drafting, and about which our opinion was not taken. Also we reject the continuation of Mursi's oppressive policies that have led to nothing but more bloodshed and political problems." Sabahy came in a close third in the country's first free presidential elections, which took place in 2012.

February 26, 2013: Mursi's Opponents Say Will Boycott Egypt Elections’
An alliance of Egyptian opposition parties decided on Tuesday to boycott parliamentary elections in protest at an election law they say favors the Muslim Brotherhood, increasing the chance that Islamists will sweep the vote. The boycott by liberal and leftist parties opposed to President Mohamed Mursi aims to undermine the legitimacy of the vote and shows the polarization that has defined Egyptian politics since Hosni Mubarak was toppled two years ago. It raises the prospect of an election fought mostly between Mursi’s Muslim Brotherhood and more hardline Islamist groups such as the Salafi Nour Party. The vote is to be held in four stages between late April and June.

The National Salvation Front (NSF) - an array of liberal and leftist parties struggling to compete with the Islamists - said there should be no elections for the lower house of parliament without a law guaranteeing fair polls. The law was passed this month by the Islamist-dominated upper house of parliament, which has been exercising legislative power in the absence of a lower house. The Islamists deny opposition accusations that the law divides constituencies in a way that favors the Muslim Brotherhood. "There can be no elections without a law that guarantees the fairness of the election process and a government that can implement such a law and be trusted by the people," said Sameh Ashour, a spokesman for the NSF, who also called for "real independence of the judiciary". With deep grass roots networks, the Islamists have won all elections since Mubarak was swept from power in a popular uprising that for a while brought Egyptians together in a display of unity rarely seen since then.

Divisions between the Islamists and their opponents have widened since Mursi won last year's presidential election. Tensions spilt into lethal street violence late last year when the president was accused of staging a power grab - accusations the Islamists dismissed as propaganda. Seeking to convince the opposition to take part, Mursi invited them to talks on Tuesday to address concerns about the vote, but the alliance declined to attend. "We tell President Mursi: talk with yourself and your party," Ashour said. Mursi went ahead with the talks anyway. "I hope these elections will be fully fair," he told the televised meeting attended by Islamists, smaller parties and independents. "We all bear the responsibility and I bear the most responsibility." Mursi said he hoped "our dear brothers who did not meet us today" would join the talks at a later date.

"OPPRESSIVE POLICIES": If the past is anything to go by, Mursi and the Brotherhood will press on regardless. In December, he held a referendum
on a constitution opposed by the opposition, securing its approval and signing it into law despite fierce protest. "The call for boycott indicates the lack of trust the opposition has in the Brotherhood government and may also speak to their own capacities to effectively compete should they run," said Elijah Zarwan, a Cairo-based political analyst. The boycott means parties led by some of the most prominent non-Islamist politicians will sit out the vote.

These include the Popular Current led by Hamdeen Sabahy, a leftist who came third in the presidential election won by Mursi last June, and the Dustour Party led by Mohamed ElBaradei, a former U.N. nuclear agency chief. "This is to protest against the elections law that we did not participate in drafting, and about which our opinion was not taken," said Heba Yassin, a spokeswoman for Popular Current. "We reject the continuation of Mursi's oppressive policies that have led to nothing but more bloodshed and political problems." The lower house was dissolved last year after a court ruled that the previous election law used to elect it was illegal.

The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party won about 40 percent of seats in the old lower house, with the Nour Party in second place. The Nour Party announced this week that it would take part in the elections. Hassan Nafaa, a political scientist and a critic of the Muslim Brotherhood, said the boycott would undermine the legitimacy of the election. But he also foresaw some parties eventually breaking the boycott. "If one of the front parties decided to enter the elections at a later stage, this will be a major blow," he said. Police arrested 55 people on Tuesday during a failed attempt to re-open Tahrir Square which has been occupied by anti-Mursi demonstrators since November, a security source said. State media described the police operation as a "peaceful process" that prompted a violent reaction from street vendors who threw petrol bombs. Police removed barbed wire barricades, briefly opening the square to traffic, but they were swiftly re-erected by the youths that man them, the source said.

February 26, 2013: Barack Obama Urges Egyptian Leader To Protect Democratic Principles‘

President Barack Obama urged Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi to protect democratic principles in Egypt and work to build political consensus as he prepares for parliamentary elections. Obama and Mursi spoke by telephone on Tuesday, a White House statement said. Liberal and leftist parties in Egypt have vowed to boycott the parliamentary
elections to protest against a law they say favors Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood.

This has raised the prospect of an election fought mostly between the Muslim Brotherhood and more hardline Islamist groups. The elections are planned in four stages between late April and June. "The president welcomed President Mursi's commitment to serving as a president for all Egyptians, including women and people of all faiths, and emphasized President Mursi's responsibility to protect the democratic principles that the Egyptian people fought so hard to secure," the White House said. Obama encouraged Mursi and all political groups within Egypt, to try to build consensus and advance the political transition, according to the statement. The two leaders also discussed Egypt's economic situation and efforts to advance regional peace and maintain a ceasefire in Gaza.

February 27, 2013: Egypt Govt Deficit Soars In 7 Months To End-January –MENA’

Egypt's government deficit rose by more than a third in the seven months to the end of January from the same period a year earlier, state media reported. Two years of political turmoil has battered state finances by driving away foreign investors and tourists, and a sharp fall in the Egyptian pound has pushed up the cost of subsidies for imported energy and food. The deficit hit 119.8 billion Egyptian pounds ($17.8 billion) in the first seven months of the fiscal year, which begins in July, compared with 88.2 billion a year earlier, the state news agency MENA said. Citing a finance ministry report, it said the figure equaled 6.7 percent of annual gross domestic product (GDP). In a revised economic reform plan, the government said it is targeting a deficit for the whole financial year to June of 189.7 billion pounds, or about 10.9 percent of total economic output. However, this factored in economic reforms and it forecast the deficit would hit 12.3 percent of GDP without action. Egypt has said it will reopen negotiations early next month on a $4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund to bolster its finances. Foreign currency reserves have also fallen to critical levels.

February 27, 2013: Egypt Govt Approves Law Allowing Islamic Bond Issues’

The Egyptian government approved a draft law on Wednesday that will allow the state to issue Islamic bonds, or sukuk, a move that could help narrow a gaping budget deficit and boost foreign currency reserves that have fallen to critically low levels. Finance Minister Al-Mursi Al-Sayed
Hegazy said Egypt could raise around $10 billion a year from the sukuk market - much more than some analysts expect - but added that it would take at least three months to push through the necessary regulations.

Shaped by Egypt's first Islamist-led administration, the law will also allow private borrowers to issue sukuk. Egypt has never before issued bonds that adhere to Islamic principles, under which the payment of interest is impermissible. The law will be referred to the Islamist-dominated upper house of parliament before final approval from President Mohamed Mursi. An earlier version of the sukuk law had been criticized by Islamic scholars, forcing a rethink. With the Mursi administration facing a deep economic crisis, the issuance of Islamic bonds could provide some financial support as parliamentary elections approach. The voting is set to begin in late April and stretch into late June.

Fitch Ratings said on Wednesday the timing meant conclusion of an agreement with the International Monetary Fund on a $4.8 billion loan could be pushed back well into the third quarter. Foreign reserves have fallen to $13.6 billion - less than the $15 billion needed to cover three months worth of imports - and the deficit is forecast to hit 12.3 percent of GDP by the end of June unless economic reforms are implemented. The deficit rose by more than a third in the seven months to the end of January from the same period a year earlier, figures released on Wednesday showed. Hegazy, an expert on Islamic finance appointed earlier this year, said in January that the Islamic Development Bank, a multilateral institution, could be ready to buy around $6 billion of sukuk. He did not make clear on Wednesday whether the $10 billion annual figure referred to state issues alone, or included amounts he expected to be raised by private borrowers.

IT'S "TOTAL HYPE": Others are less optimistic. "There is a total hype over the issue. It is a minor issue that might contribute funding of 10 to 15 percent of Egypt's needs," said Osama Mourad, a financial and capital markets expert. "The problem is not with the instruments but with the general investment appetite towards Egypt in times of confusion." The economy has been hit by unrest that has driven away tourists and investors, and the Egyptian pound has lost 8.2 percent against the dollar since the end of last year. The government has said it will resume talks with the IMF next month on a loan that would unlock billions of dollars more of financial support from foreign states and international bodies. But an IMF agreement will also imply austerity measures.
Fitch Ratings said it had expected a deal in the second quarter. "But voting is now set to continue until late June, shortly before the start of Ramadan and the summer holiday season," it said. "This need not hold up negotiations, but finalizing a program would probably be more straightforward after contested elections that produced a government with a clear mandate to conclude a deal." Egypt reached an initial agreement on the loan in November but postponed final ratification following political unrest in Cairo, which led the government to put off tax increases needed to rein in the deficit. In a summary of its new plans for the economy released this week, the government said it aimed to increase the foreign currency reserves to $19 billion by the end of June. But it did not say how. The plan will form the basis of talks with the IMF. The government, in a statement released on Wednesday, described the plan as "much more gradual" than previous proposals. It said the reforms would be spread over a longer time frame, the impact of some of them would reduced while others were entirely dismissed. But it gave no details.

February 27, 2013: Factories Struggle In Egypt As Costs, Risks Rise’

The blue steel gates of Abu al-Makarim factory, once busy with staff carrying Egyptian carpets for export, are now rust-encrusted and bolted shut after worker strikes and financial problems forced the plant out of business eight months ago. The abandoned facility in Madinat Elsadat, near Cairo, is one of thousands that have fallen victim to the instability of post-revolution Egypt. Many that remain open are plagued by power cuts, strikes, poor security, and difficulty securing loans in credit markets where they are squeezed out by an indebted government.

The plight of Egypt's industrialists points to the wide range of ways which the economic environment has deteriorated in the two years since Hosni Mubarak was toppled. Because of endemic political conflict, foreign investment has shrunk and foreign currency reserves have slid to critically low levels as President Mohamed Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood prepares for parliamentary elections starting in late April. At Madinat Elsadat, 75 of the 525 factories that once operated in the complex have shut down since the revolution, according to a report by the Centre for Trade Union & Worker Services. Up to half of the factories are struggling.

Countrywide, the report estimates over 4,500 factories have shut since the revolution, swelling by hundreds of thousands the ranks of unemployed in a nation where two-fifths of the people live on or around the poverty line. The unemployment rate is around 13 percent, according to official data, but private analysts believe the actual rate is much higher.
The Abu al-Makarim Group, which had employed more than 4,000 workers at seven factories, had been struggling even before the uprising against Mubarak erupted in January 2011. The wave of industrial action that ensued was the final nail in its coffin. "There were strikes, asking for raises. Each day cost hundreds of thousands," said Hassan Abu al-Makarim, who ran the company before the revolution. "There was also a shortage in financing to buy material." It is a complaint echoed by many other businessmen. The government is borrowing heavily to finance a budget deficit forecast to hit 10 percent of national output this fiscal year. That is soaking up the money available to industry. The risks of doing business are heightened by a security vacuum which the police have been unwilling or unable to fill since Mubarak's rule ended.

In Madinat El-Sadat, set up in the 1980s to shift population out of Cairo, police are few and far between. Gangs intercept shipments and steal goods on their way out of the industrial area. "Some investors closed up and left because of the lack of security and stability," said Ahmad Shaheen, owner of a facility where fruit and vegetables are stored and frozen for export. He said his clients had in many cases hired armed guards to protect trucks during transit to and from the depot. For some business owners, the security risks come from their own employees. Workers at one Madinat Elsadat clothing factory detained the owner overnight after salary payments were delayed for two months, said Abdulaziz Ghaslan, who used to work there. "There is no control over workers anymore. They were under a lot of pressure before the revolution so when everything became so loose, they became people who do not want to be controlled, asking for their rights," he said. Ghaslan lost his job at the factory following work stoppages. Workers demanding better salaries barricaded the gates of their cement factory with concrete blocks during one recent burst of industrial action.

RISING COSTS: In some ways, the revolution still promises to benefit industrialists. By sweeping away some of the entrenched business interests and corruption that surrounded Mubarak, it offers new freedom and opportunities to investors. The slide in the Egyptian pound, down about 8 percent since late December to record lows against the U.S. dollar, is a boon to some exporters. Egyptian investment firm Citadel Capital, which owns stakes in companies which export over $300 million a year in various industries including food, says it is profiting. "Currency devaluation is affecting our business positively. If you are investing in an exporter or import substitute, then you'll benefit," Citadel founder and
chairman Ahmed Heikal told Reuters, predicting that exports would rise substantially.

But many or most Egyptian companies feel they are in no position to take advantage of the positive changes because the operating environment is so poor. Energy shortages, for example, have resulted in gas supplies being diverted from businesses to the national pipeline: factories that depend on gas to function have either cut back their output or shut down altogether. The cost of subsidizing imported fuels sold by the state below market prices is becoming unsustainable for the government, and this is creating further uncertainty. Last week, the government announced a 50 percent increase in the price of fuels used by some industries, triggering protests by brick factory workers whose sector was one of those affected.

In coming months the government hopes to secure a $4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund, easing the financial pressures on it, but to obtain the deal it is expected to have to commit to further subsidy cuts. Foreign investors were excited by the opportunities that Egypt had to offer just after Mubarak was toppled, said Mohamed Talaat Khalifa, a financial analyst. Would-be investors now list concerns about everything from logistics to security: some are postponing projects until the situation is clearer, he said. "There are problems with shipping, problems with the logistics and even security in transporting goods from the factory to the port," he said. As a result, insurance premiums and other costs have risen to levels where projects may no longer be economically viable. "They're definitely eager to invest in Egypt. Just as the Gulf has oil, Egypt's oil is its people...but there cannot be an appetite unless there is stability."

February 28, 2013: Egypt To Invite IMF Team For Loan Talks’

Egypt will invite the IMF on Thursday to reopen negotiations on a $4.8 billion loan, state newspaper al-Ahram reported, and the investment minister expressed hope that a deal could be done by the end of April. International Monetary Fund support is seen as crucial to help ease an economic crisis rooted in two years of political turmoil that has depleted foreign currency reserves to critically low levels. Egypt reached an initial agreement on the loan in November but postponed final ratification following political unrest in Cairo, which led the government to put off tax increases needed to rein in the budget deficit. "Today, a formal invitation will be sent to the technical delegation of the International Monetary Fund to come to Cairo to negotiate over the $4.8 billion loan to Egypt," Planning and International Cooperation Minister Ashraf al-Araby said in remarks reported by the state-run al-Ahram newspaper. On its website, the paper
also "ed him as saying he expected the delegation to arrive in Cairo "within 10 days". Separately, Investment Minister Osama Saleh told journalists he expected the deal to be concluded by the end of April. "We have hope, God willing, that we can, by the end of April complete the loan," he said. Saleh added that much of the work was done last year and recent changes to the government's economic reform program amounted to "light amendments". But April is sooner than many economists believe possible, with parliamentary elections due to begin in late that month and go on until late June. They believe the Muslim Brotherhood-led administration will be reluctant to conclude a deal including austerity measures ahead of the vote. Fitch Ratings said on Wednesday the extended election timetable could delay the agreement until well into the third quarter. It had previously expected a deal in Q2.

MUFTI SAYS IMF BORROWING IS OKAY IN ISLAM: Egypt's foreign currency reserves fell to $13.6 billion in January, less than the $15 billion needed to cover three months' worth of imports to the country of 84 million people. Foreign exchange reserve figures for February are expected next week. The budget deficit is meanwhile forecast to hit 12.3 percent of GDP by end-June unless economic reforms are implemented. Political unrest has caused the Egyptian pound to tumble 8.2 percent against the dollar since the end of last year, and the central bank is rationing the amount of dollars it sells to banks, prioritizing hard currency for essential food imports.

In a summary of its new plans for the economy released this week, the government said it aimed to increase the foreign currency reserves to $19 billion by the end of June, but did not say how. The plan will form the basis of talks with the IMF. Assuming the government can conclude a quick agreement with the Fund, the deal may face other complications. The Nour Party, Egypt's main hardline Islamist group, has said any deal must be approved by a body of senior scholars at Al-Azhar, a religious institution which should be consulted on matters related to Islamic law according to a new constitution. Outgoing Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa said Islamic law had no problem with borrowing from the Fund, even though payment of interest on loans is deemed impermissible in Islam. Gomaa said any funds would amount to "financing", not "a loan". "Calling it 'a loan' is wrong because we are partners in this bank and it is giving us this money in the manner of finance," he told Al Masry Al Youm, a daily newspaper.
February 28, 2013: Exclusive - Egypt Reconsiders Wheat Tender System
In Funding Crunch - banks’ Funding problems are forcing top world wheat buyer Egypt to consider abandoning its regular public tenders that have been a centerpiece of world grain trade for decades. Egypt’s state grains buyer General Authority for Supply Commodities, (GASC), is exploring options beyond systematic tenders to secure future needs, banks involved in commodity trade finance for the country said. Imports to the north African country are sharply down this year, with strategic stocks falling as it endures economic and political crisis, but state and private buyers insist they have funds to keep the nation supplied with its staple bread. Falling currency reserves are hindering GASC’s ability to buy wheat in a timely manner, banks said. GASC, which last week saw its influential head Nomani Nomani step aside, declined to comment. "Very clearly people are looking for alternatives because the classic route of letters of credit or cash against documents are not working as they were," said Fehmi Hannachi, head of commodity finance for Middle East and North Africa at ABC International Bank plc and board member of ABC Egypt. Karel Valken, global head of trade and commodity finance at Rabobank, said: "Letters of credit are not working to the satisfaction of all parties. It's definitely restricting the volumes and the timely arrivals of wheat and undoubtedly it's having an impact on the price. Consequently all the parties involved are looking at different ways to mitigate these issues." Egypt normally buys strategically to ensure it has wheat stocks equal to at least six months' consumption in its silos. By contrast, the government said on Wednesday that it has stocks to last until May 29, or just three months.

GASC tenders are watched avidly by international wheat traders and without them world markets would lose a vital window of transparency. Banks said trade houses were exploring options outside of GASC's current sourcing strategy, including private deals. "GASC's main objective is to feed the Egyptian population in the most cost effective way and if that means for them to go out of tender terms and do a private deal they will undoubtedly do that," said Valken. When GASC awards a tender the company selling the wheat typically asks for the issuance of an Egyptian state bank letter of credit, which is then confirmed with its own bank. A recent development has been a requirement for GASC to post cash with Egyptian banks which serves as security for the banks confirming the letters of credit on behalf of sellers. "This flow is still working, it's just becoming more difficult because of amongst other things the (country's situation with) FX reserves and consequently GASC's access to cash and credit with its own banks," said Valken. "It is definitely delaying the
purchases and it's more expensive. The costs for them of importing wheat have risen due to a combination of demurrage costs and financing."
Demurrage charges are incurred when a ship is delayed.

FINANCING OPTIONS: The Egyptian pound has fallen more than 8 percent since the start of January, and foreign currency reserves have tumbled to $13.6 billion in January from $36 billion before the 2011 fall of former president Hosni Mubarak. The pound's drop is putting a heavy strain on the government budget as it has pushed up the cost of state subsidies on energy and food, much of which is purchased in dollars. ABC's Hannachi said the crisis meant other options for wheat procurement were being explored. "A lot of operators abroad and local Egyptian importers are questioning the method because you open a tender which is pricing driven, but on the other side those providing the most competitive prices are not necessarily the most flexible suppliers in terms of financing," he said.

Importers are trying to find mechanisms with their suppliers to import the goods to Egypt, building stock locally to release progressively, to avoid the situation of having to pay for everything in one shot. "You could supply sugar or wheat by building stock in Egypt and only release it against partial payments based on the availability of hard currency," Hannachi added. Rabobank's Valken saw room for more structured finance in different forms to facilitate banks, grain traders and GASC. "Trade is desperately looking at alternative structures because GASC continues to be the single largest wheat buyer globally. People definitely need wheat and the government needs to put enough foreign reserves aside to make imports possible," said Valken. Egypt imports about half the 18.8 million tons of wheat it consumes a year, with business split roughly evenly between private importers and GASC. The U.S. Department of Agriculture had estimated Egypt's imports at 9.5 million tons in 2012/13. GASC has bought 235,000 tons of wheat since Jan. 1, about a third of what it purchased in the same period a year earlier. Regular participants in recent tenders include Archer Daniels Midland -controlled Toepfer, Bunge, Cargill, Louis Dreyfus, along with Egyptian traders Alex Grain and Venus.


As cities along the Suez Canal erupted in violence in late January, the leader of Egypt's armed forces feared for the future of the fledgling democracy. General Abdel Fattah Sisi told the elected president, Mohamed Mursi, that the situation was critical, according to Egyptian security
sources familiar with the events. "The military leadership advised the president that national security was threatened following the chaos and vandalism that befell the cities of Suez and Port Said," a security source with links to the military told Reuters. The two men discussed ways to contain the unrest along the Canal, which is vital to Egypt and global trade, agreeing the army could not stand by and let the turmoil spread. Early on Saturday January 26 troops deployed in the riot-torn cities: in Suez armored vehicles arrived to protect government buildings. Mursi announced a night-time curfew in the towns. It was a telling moment in Egypt's struggle to establish a real democracy. When popular uprisings overthrew the former regime of Hosni Mubarak two years ago, the army, which had played a central role in the state for decades, determined to stand back as political parties vied for power. Many analysts believe that after Mursi was elected in June 2012, he and the military came to an understanding: the new Islamist government would not interfere in the army's interests, nor seek to change its long-standing vision of national security, while the military would give qualified support to Mursi and his backers in the Muslim Brotherhood.

But that deal has limits, as Egyptians are discovering. The army felt compelled to intervene to quell the January riots, according to security sources, though they were at pains to say it did not do so unilaterally. "The president and the national defense council made the decision to impose the state of emergency and a curfew until the situation stabilizes," said the security source with links to the military. Security and political sources told Reuters that Sisi, the defense minister, also privately urged political leaders to set aside their differences in the face of a social and financial crisis. Though the armed forces say they want to remain neutral, they believe they cannot ignore the situation on the streets. "We are not political, we don't want to participate in the political situation because we suffered a lot because of this in the last six months," Major General Sediki Sobhi, the army chief of staff, told Reuters at an industry event in Abu Dhabi. "But sometimes we can help in this problem, we can play this role if the situation became more complicated." As Egypt heads towards new parliamentary elections beginning on April 22, and as the Muslim Brotherhood and the military eye each other closely, Mursi finds himself caught in the middle. Essam Haddad, Mursi's aide on foreign affairs, told Reuters that the relationship between the armed forces and the presidency had "been developing in a very positive direction."

Nevertheless, there has been recent speculation in Egyptian media and on social networking sites of tensions between Brotherhood members and the military. Haddad blamed the Egyptian media for creating "a sort of a gap,
an artificial gap, an artificial misunderstanding ... If you follow some of the Egyptian media, you will find some unprecedented claims of a military coup coming."

FATAL FOOTBALL: An unfortunate confluence of events brought popular unrest to the boil in late January. As the country headed towards the second anniversary of its revolution, opponents of Mursi stepped up protests. At the same time a court was preparing to deliver verdicts on police, officials and other suspects charged with murder after 74 people died during a stampede at a football stadium in Port Said last year. It was a combustible mix. When judges in the football case sentenced 21 people to death, fury erupted in Port Said. As street protests left at least 32 people dead, the army moved in. General Osama Askar, commander of the third army division in Suez, said at the time: "This is an emergency deployment to assist the police ... this is not the army's role but we are assisting the police force in imposing law and order for now."

Behind the scenes Sisi, a former head of military intelligence, went further than merely assisting the police. On January 28, according to security sources, he spoke to Mursi's political rivals in the National Salvation Front: Mohamed ElBaradei, former head of the U.N. nuclear agency: Hamdeen Sabahy, seen by some as a leftist firebrand: and Amr Moussa, a former chief of the Arab League. Sisi treated each of the politicians with friendliness and respect, said security sources, but made his point clear: chaos in the Suez cities endangered the Canal and threatened the stability of the state. He told the political leaders they must compromise over their differences.

"The country was facing a political stalemate that had to be ended to prevent a downward spiral of events. Now is not the time to dissolve a newly elected state institution (the presidency)," said the security source with links to the military. To ram the point home, Sisi went public with his message the next day, warning that political unrest was pushing the state to the brink of collapse. The military leadership also played a role in bringing political leaders together two days later, under the auspices of the head of the venerable Azhar university. The party leaders met and signed a document renouncing violence. In a continuation of a system operated by Mubarak, the new Islamist government has agreed that decisions on the military budget will continue to be discussed in the national defense council, not parliament. In the council - which includes the president, parliament speaker and military leaders - security officials have the upper hand over civilian members. The government has also
guaranteed the armed forces control over provinces along the border with Israel and along the Suez Canal, according to a Muslim Brotherhood source. Egyptian authorities announced at the end of January that shipping fees for the Canal would rise between two and five percent from May 1. The waterway is an important source of funds for the country and for the military, generating revenue of about $5 billion a year in hard currency.

'ALLIANCE OF CONVENIENCE' On February 3, Sisi dined in private with Mursi at the president's home near Cairo. The army chief acknowledges the prestige of Mursi's position as president, said two security sources. At the same time, Mursi respects Sisi, according to the president's office, army officials and the Muslim Brotherhood source. At 59, Sisi is the youngest member of the government's military council made up of commanders from various branches of the armed forces. "Generally, the alliance of convenience was that the Brotherhood would respect the military's autonomy, and that would include their economic position in the country, and in return the military would give up its opposition to Brotherhood rule," said Shadi Hamid, director of research at the Brookings Doha Centre, a think-tank based in the Gulf. At present there seem few other options, said Hamid. "It's not as if there's a more stable alternative to Brotherhood rule right now or in the foreseeable future. I see no reason for the military to reduce its support for the Brotherhood or to undermine the Mursi government right now." In Hamid's view, the street protests are a "generalized expression of anger over the status quo" but it is unclear whether they will translate into significant electoral support for Mursi's opponents. This week an alliance of opposition parties said they would boycott the parliamentary elections.

Some foreign powers appear to take the view that amid uncertain political times Egypt's armed forces remain a constant. On February 5, then U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta spoke to Sisi about the political situation in Egypt, discussing the "importance of continued security assistance for Egypt so that the Egyptian armed forces can continue to address shared security objectives while modernizing their equipment and capabilities," according to a statement issued by the Pentagon. Egypt's military has worried that political instability might be used as an excuse by other countries to cut aid: some members of the U.S. Congress had tried to block a deal, agreed when Mubarak was in power, to give Egypt F-16 fighters. But U.S. and Egyptian officials announced this month that the U.S. had gone ahead with delivery of four F-16 fighter jets as part of their continuing co-operation. An Egyptian military official told Reuters: "The
military leadership has told the American counterparts that the armed forces is a national institution and has nothing to do with politics ... and that supplying the Egyptian army with weapons is the strongest strategic link between Egypt and the United States."

February 28, 2013: Retrial of Egypt's Hosni Mubarak set for April, 13 - AP

Egypt's ousted President Hosni Mubarak will face a new trial beginning April 13 on charges related to the killings of protesters during the uprising against him, a court ruled Sunday. Mubarak and his former interior minister were sentenced to life in prison in June for failing to prevent the killing of protesters during the 18-day revolution in 2011 that ended his 29-year rule. In January, an appeals court overturned the sentences and ordered a retrial. Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, 84, has been in detention since April 2011 and is currently being held in a military hospital. It is seen unlikely that he will be freed before his retrial. The ruling ordering a retrial raised public anger over what was seen as a shoddy prosecution case. Critics believed Mubarak should have been convicted for directly ordering the deadly crackdown and sentenced to death. The issue of the revolution's dead is a sensitive one in Egypt, with the families of the victims demanding retribution and compensation. Mubarak's successor, Mohammed Morsi, promised during his election campaign that he would order retrials for former regime officials if new evidence was discovered. A retrial could help resolve unanswered questions over who ordered the crackdown and who executed it. Most of security officials on separate trials for the killings of protesters were acquitted.

In January, the appeals court ruled that during Mubarak's first trial, the prosecution's case lacked concrete evidence and failed to prove the protesters were killed by the police, indirectly giving credence to the testimony of top Mubarak-era officials that "foreigners" and others were behind the killings between Jan. 25 and Feb. 1, 2011. Critics scoffed at those charges, blaming Mubarak's police and sympathizers. Authors of a recently concluded confidential report by a fact-finding mission appointed by Morsi say they have established the use of deadly firearms by the police against protesters. Judge Samir Aboul-Maati said the retrial before a criminal court will also include six other senior security officials who were acquitted in the first trial. Also include Mubarak's two sons and a business associate will be retried on corruption charges. The sons, onetime heir apparent Gamal and wealthy businessman Alaa, are in jail while on trial for insider trading and using their influence to buy state land
at a fraction of its market value. The business associate, Hussein Salem, was tried in absentia. He is currently in Spain.

May 25, 2013: Mohammed Morsi underlines 'agreement' with Ethiopia over controversial GERD' Speaking on a number of issues at the AU summit, President Morsi batted away concerns about the Ethiopian Nile dam project. Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi said on Saturday that he had made an agreement with Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn that both countries' interests would be addressed during the building of the 'Renaissance Dam' in Ethiopia, which many some experts argue will reduce Egypt's share of the Nile's potable water. Speaking to Egyptians in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa, where he is currently attending the 21st African Union summit, Morsi stated that there is a committee of experts from both countries that will scrutinize all the details and possible ramifications of the controversial dam. Morsi also made some optimistic statements concerning the future of the Egypt, saying that the country had left behind dictatorships, repression and corruption, in reference to the Mubarak regime. "Egypt is on the right track to democratic transition," he said. "What will take Egypt to prosperity and development is work, awareness, and production." "There are many citizens who work hard silently in all sectors to build this nation, including 17 million citizens in the private sector, six million in the public sector and six million farmers who are working in fields to provide the Egyptian people with a harvest and with food," the Islamist president added.

Suez Canal project 'will lead to turnaround: Morsi went on to speak about the government's contentious Suez Canal Corridor (SCC) project, saying it would lead to a turnaround in the country's fortunes. The SCC project, which will be operated through public-private partnerships, aims to develop Egypt's three canal governorates – Suez, Ismailia and Port Said – by 2017. The project represents a major component of President Morsi's 'renaissance' electoral program. "[The project] will attract local, Arab and foreign investments," Morsi said. Critics of the proposed legislation regulating the project say it will place the Suez Canal outside Egyptian sovereignty and grant investors substantial facilities without offering any returns to workers or the economy.

Rebel campaign 'undemocratic: Commenting on the 'Rebel' campaign, which aims at "withdrawing confidence" from the Islamist president, Morsi said that those involved in the signature drive should not forget the principle of democracy that the majority choose the president. "Some people say that I barely got 52 percent of the votes in [last year's]
presidential elections [after beating runner up Ahmed Shafiq in the second round], but legally and constitutionally speaking I am the legitimate president." "Everyone must accept the result of the democratic way, so we do not lose time and miss out on many chances as a result of disagreements." Campaigners holding posters bearing the word 'Rebel' ('tamarrud' in Arabic) have become a common sight in Cairo's streets and squares in recent days, as have the sight of citizens holding their national identity cards and filling out the forms heeding the campaigners’ calls. The campaign aims to gather 15 million signatures to pressure Morsi into calling early presidential elections. Organizers claimed at the start of the week to have 3 million signatures so far. Source: ahramonline.

NILE: Egypt should cooperate with Ethiopia as sign of apology for ignored relations during Mubarak’s era’ (Translated from Arabic to English using Google Translator)

ST (June 14, 2014) - Well known former member of Egypt Parliament Abul Ezz Hariri leader of party People’s Alliance says the expected visit of President-elect Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to Addis Ababa in two weeks to resolve the crisis Dam Renaissance is a good idea to restore the role of Egypt Regional area of the Nile Basin countries, especially Ethiopia. Hariri said in a statement to “veto,” that this visit would put solutions to the crisis of the dam, by initiating projects aimed at economic integration between the two parties.

The former former parliamentarian demanded that during the trip to Ethiopia Sisi should be accompanied by a number of experts and consultants. He also suggested specialists offer a number of cooperative projects between the two sides which are mutually beneficial for both Egypt and Ethiopia. This gestures are equivalent (tantamount) to an apology from Egypt to Ethiopia for what has happened during the era of former President Mubarak such as ignored in relations and cooperation.

Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahlab, should quickly learn projects submitted to them by some specialists on the crisis and try to solve the crisis. Among these projects one of them is made by Dr Ahmed Shenawi, an expert on water. Ethiopia can generate electricity from the Renaissance Dam and at the same time maintain its share of the waters of Egypt, and reduce the risk of construction of the dam in addition to the cost of its operation does not exceed 20% of the cost of construction of the dam. (Text ends)

Ethiopia sees Egyptian change of heart over Nile dam’
ADDIS ABABA – Ethiopia on Thursday commended Egypt’s unprecedented and an official decision to peacefully resolve a long-standing dispute with Addis Ababa over a controversial power plant project known as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). “Ethiopia strongly welcomes Egypt’s interest to re-launch talk over the GERD and solve the problem through dialogue,” spokesperson for Ethiopia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Dina Mufti told journalists.

“Egypt has no other option except dialogue and win-win negotiation to find a solution that is acceptable by both sides,” he added. Egypt’s newly elected president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has recently pledged to resolve the water dispute with Ethiopia through dialogue. Ethiopian officials said that al-Sisi is expected to pay an official visit to Ethiopia soon probably making it his first trip to a foreign nation since he assumed office in June 8. Ethiopian foreign minister Tedros Adhanom, who attended the new president’s inaugural ceremony in Cairo, has held meeting with al-Sisi and other high ranking officials over the multi-billion dollar power plant project.

During their discussion Adhanom has reaffirmed Ethiopia’s commitment for cooperation with Egypt based on mutual trust and confidence. Al-Sisi and Adhanom have also agreed to reactivate the tripartite technical dialogue between Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia and harmonise existing differences by high-level political consultations. Addis Ababa insists the $4.6 billion dam project won’t adversely affect Egypt and Sudan instead the downstream countries will be benefited from the cheap and renewable hydro power processed electricity it generates. Egypt considers the massive dam project, as a threat to its water security arguing it will eventually diminish its water share.

SUDAN REAFFIRMS SUPPORT: Meanwhile, Sudanese vice-president Bakri Hassan Saleh has reaffirmed his country’s commitment to the dam project which Ethiopia is building in Nile river near the Sudanese border. Saleh who was in Addis Ababa earlier this week to attend a regional summit of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) made the remarks while holding talks Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn. “Sudan will derive multiple benefits from the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project,” Saleh said according to the state-run Ethiopian Radio and Television Agency (ERTA).

SOUTH SUDAN CRISIS: Saleh and Desalegn have also consulted on the six-month-long conflict in South Sudan. While commending Ethiopia’s role
to peacefully end the conflict in neighbouring South Sudan, Saleh called on Addis Ababa to continue exerting maximum efforts to bring lasting solution. Desalegn has also assured his country would remain committed to end the political crises in the youngest nation. “Ethiopia will continue to put pressure on the South Sudanese rivals through all channels available,” the Ethiopian premier said.

On Tuesday, rival leaders of the two SPLM rival factions, President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar agreed to end fighting and form a unity government within two months. At a news conference on Friday, spokesperson for the Ethiopian foreign ministry Dina Mufti said IGAD-member countries have been frustrated by the failure of previous deals. He however went on to saying that the regional bloc mediating the two warring factions won’t hesitate to take action if the two sides once again violate the latest agreements. He added that a peacekeeping force drawn from Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya will be deployed to end the conflict which has killed thousands since violence erupted in mid-December last year. (Text ends)

NILE POLITICS: Egypt to participate in NBI meeting, despite announcing it has frozen membership’ Egypt Independent (June 19, 2014) - A delegation headed by Ahmed Bahaa Eddin, left Cairo heading to Khartoum, Wednesday, to participate in the 22nd meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Nile Basin countries, held under the framework of the Basin Countries Initiative. Egypt has dispatched the delegation despite announcing it has frozen its initiative membership.

A delegation member said before departure that although Egypt has frozen its membership in the Nile Basin Initiative due to differences with Basin countries over Entebbe agreement, Egypt is keen to participate in the meeting. Egypt believes that the Entebbe agreement is incomplete as other Nile headwaters countries have signed the agreement individually, the official added.

Ministers of water resources of Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Tanzania will take part in the meeting which aims to discuss means of coordination and cooperation between the Nile Basin countries through development projects.

NILE POLITICS: Egypt and Ethiopia agree on tripartite dam committee will resume its work’
Ahram Online (June 27, 2014) - Egypt President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi talks to Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn as they arrive to attend the 23rd African Union Summit (AUS) in Malabo June 26, 2014. The Egyptian foreign minister along with his Ethiopian counterpart stressed that Ethiopia will understand the importance of the Nile River to Egypt and that Egypt will understand the Ethiopian need for development. Egypt and Ethiopia will form a joint committee in the upcoming three months to enhance bilateral relations between the two countries, the foreign ministers of both countries announced in a joint statement on Friday. The statement came after Egypt’s new president, Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, met with the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, after the African Union summit in Equatorial Guinea’s capital Malabo.

According to the statement, the Ethiopian government is committed to avoid any potential damage that could result from the Grand Renaissance dam currently being built on the Blue Nile in Ethiopia. Sameh Shoukry, the Egyptian foreign minister, along with his Ethiopian counterpart Tedros Adhanom, stressed in the statement that Ethiopia will understand the importance of the Nile to Egypt: and that Egypt will understand the Ethiopian plans and need for development. The two ministers cited seven main points that El-Sisi and Desalegn discussed during the meeting, including respecting the dialogue and cooperation between the two countries, and the establishment of regional projects for the development of financial resources to meet the growing demand for water and to deal with water shortages. The Egyptian government is committed to constructive communication with Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian dam has been a source of concern for the Egyptian government since May last year, when images of the dam’s construction stirred public anxiety about its possible effects on Egypt’s share of the Nile’s water. However, Ethiopian officials insisted the dam would not harm Egypt. Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan formed a tripartite technical committee to study the possible effects of the dam. But the committee’s discussions were halted last December when Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir announced his support for the dam during a meeting with Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn. Resuming the work of the tripartite technical committee and respecting international legal principles were also among the points on which both sides had reached common ground. Egypt has demanded that Ethiopia submit the dam’s construction plans for assessment by international experts. Ethiopian Irrigation Minister Alamayo Tegno said his country was already committed to the recommendations of an international committee of experts.
NILE POLITICS: Egypt cautiously optimistic on coming Renaissance Dam talks’

Al Monitor, CAIRO (July 9, 2014) — In a state of cautious optimism, the Egyptian authorities dealing with the Nile waters file have begun to prepare for the return of technical negotiations with Ethiopia concerning the Renaissance Dam and the two countries’ use of the Nile. This comes after negotiations ended last January and Cairo took the course of international escalation to protect its interests in the Nile.

Egypt and Ethiopia are returning to the negotiating table again, following the meeting between President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn at the African Union Summit in Equatorial Guinea on June 26. In this meeting, the two sides agreed on seven key principles that specify the two countries’ uses of Nile water, in the framework of mutual benefit and avoiding harm.

According to the seven principles that were announced by the Egyptian and Ethiopian foreign ministers in a joint statement on June 27 — of which Al-Monitor obtained a copy — the negotiations must be based on respect for international law, prioritizing the establishment of regional projects to develop water resources to meet increasing demands, respect for the results of technical studies concerning the impact of the Renaissance Dam and a commitment on the part of the Ethiopian government to avoid any harm to Egypt’s water use.

Speaking to Al-Monitor by phone, Egyptian Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation Hossam Moghazy said, “Preparations are currently underway for a tripartite meeting that will include Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt to revive negotiations again in Cairo in the second half of July 2014.”

Moghazy expressed optimism about the return of technical negotiations, adding, “The joint statement will impose an atmosphere of tranquility and a positive spirit throughout the negotiations, following the state of tension that existed previously.”

However, the minister acknowledged that they would not rely on the results of the previous negotiations, which began in November 2013, following the issuance of a report by the International Panel of Experts (IPE) on the effects of the Renaissance Dam. The report confirmed some technical problems in the dam’s design as well as harmful effects on water security in Egypt.
“Of course, we will benefit from [what has been done] previously, but we will deal with the issue with calm,” he said, adding, “The first meeting will be preparatory and we will not discuss technical issues relating to the Renaissance Dam. We will agree to establishing a mechanism for dialogue and discuss the method of action in the event of a dispute, as well as choosing technical experts.”

Moghazy cited Cairo’s interest in the continuation of political action in all countries of the Nile Basin. “In the coming period, there will be many official visits to the Nile Basin countries, in especially Tanzania and South Sudan,” he added.

The Supreme Committee for the Nile Waters, headed by Egyptian Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb, met on July 6 to discuss the results of the meeting between Sisi and the Ethiopian prime minister, the mechanisms for implementing the Egyptian-Ethiopian joint statement and to agree on Egypt’s vision for managing the file after the policy of appeasement and dialogue took effect.

An Egyptian governmental source who is well informed on the Nile Basin file told Al-Monitor, “We realize that the negotiations with Ethiopia will not be easy, especially since all negotiating cards are now known by the other side. Ethiopia realizes the extent of Egypt’s objections to building the dam, and Egypt is aware of Ethiopia’s insistence on building the dam according to the previously announced specifications.”

“We await the start of negotiations in a state of cautious optimism. We had many previous experiences [in this regard], but they did not end in an agreement,” he added.

Al-Monitor spoke with Mahmoud Abu Zeid, Egypt’s former minister of water and the current head of the Arab Water Council, on this topic. “The joint statement issued after the talks between Sisi and Desalegn includes technical details related to principles for usage of the Nile waters, which can be of benefit in making the negotiations a success,” he said.

“Egypt’s previous technical positions concerning the Renaissance Dam are still open to deliberation and re-examination, but the basis [of these positions] is reaching technical and engineering solutions that minimize damage,” he added, stressing, “I don’t imagine that these dialogues will end without a substantial modification in the form or capacity of the dam.”
A technical source involved in the preparations for the meeting between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan told Al-Monitor, “There are a number of technical files that Cairo will focus on during the negotiations, according to the report by the IPE on the effects of the Renaissance Dam.”

“The most important files that Egypt will ask to be re-examined include the effect of the size of the storage lake, increasing the Renaissance Dam’s water flow to the High Dam Lake in Egypt as well as the environmental effects on Egypt,” the source added. “There are hopes that the negotiations will propose joint Egyptian-Ethiopian mechanisms for operating the dam. This will ensure Ethiopia’s interests by providing for its electricity needs and also ensure a flow of water to Egypt at annual rates corresponding to the historical rate set at 55.5 billion cubic meters.”

Despite the warm welcome and support expressed by political and media circles in Egypt after the issuance of the joint Egyptian-Ethiopian statement about the dispute, the statement that resulted from the negotiations between Sisi and Desalegn is not a first in the history of Egyptian-Ethiopian agreements and memorandums of understanding. These previous agreements also did not end the state of conflict over the Nile waters.

Former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak signed a formal cooperation framework agreement with late Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in July 1993. The agreement stipulated that neither of the two countries would undertake any activity relating to the Nile waters that could harm the interests of the other and to respect international laws. However, the agreement was not implemented, because the Ethiopian parliament at the time did not ratify it.

As the convening of technical negotiations approaches later in July, Cairo is cautiously awaiting the results. Meanwhile, authorities in both countries are not giving their positions on the construction works at the Renaissance Dam site or on the possibility of suspending work there until the end of technical negotiations in anticipation of an agreement to modify some of the technical specifications for the dam. (Text ends)
Egypt – Timeline Diaries updates, and related key notes:

Circa 7000 BC - Settlement of Nile Valley begins.

Circa 3000 BC - Kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt unite. Successive dynasties witness flourishing trade, prosperity and the development of great cultural traditions. Writing, including hieroglyphics, is used as an instrument of state. Construction of the pyramids - around 2,500 BC - is a formidable engineering achievement.

Circa 669 BC - Assyrians from Mesopotamia conquer and rule Egypt.

525 BC – The Persian conquest.

332 BC - Alexander the Great, of ancient Macedonia, conquers Egypt, founds Alexandria. A Macedonian dynasty rules Egypt until 31 BC.

31 BC - Egypt comes under Roman rule: Queen Cleopatra commits suicide after Octavian's army defeats her forces.

642 AD - Arab conquest of Egypt

969 - Cairo established as capital.

1250-1517 - Mameluke (slave soldier) rule, characterized by great prosperity and well-ordered civic institutions.

1517 - Egypt absorbed into the Turkish Ottoman empire.

1798 - Napoleon Bonaparte's forces invade but are repelled by the British and the Turks in 1801. Egypt once more becomes part of the Ottoman empire.

1859-69 – The Suez Canal built.

1882 – The British troops take control of Egypt.

1914 - Egypt becomes a British protectorate.

1922 - Fuad I becomes King of Egypt and Egypt gains its independence.

1928 - Muslim Brotherhood founded by Hassan al-Banna.

1936 - April - Farouk succeeds his father as King of Egypt.

1948 - Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Syria attack the new state of Israel.
1949 February - Hassan al-Banna of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwan Muslimeen) is assassinated.

1949 – A Committee of the Free Officers' Movement formed in clandestine.

In January, 1952 - At least 20 people are killed in anti-British riots in Cairo.

In 1952 - Coup by the Free Officers' Movement. King Farouk abdicates in favor of his infant son Ahmed Fuad II.

In 1953 - Coup leader General Muhammad Najib becomes symbolic president as Egypt is declared a republic.

In 1954 - Fellow coup leader Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser becomes prime minister and in 1956 president, ruling unchallenged until his death in September, 1970.


In July, 1956 – President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalizes the Suez Canal to fund the Aswan High Dam.

In October, 1956 - Tripartite Invasion of Egypt by Britain, France and Israel due to the nationalization of the Suez Canal. A ceasefire is declared in the next November.

In February, 1958 - Egypt and Syria joined to form the United Arab Republic (UAR) in the first step of their aim for Arab unity.

In 1961 - Syria withdraws from the union with Egypt, but Egypt remains known as the United Arab Republic (UAR).

In May, 1967 - Egypt, Jordan sign defense pact. Israel says it increases danger of war with Arab states.

In June, 1967 – The Six-Day War in which Israel defeats forces of Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Israel takes control of Sinai, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

In 1970 September – President Gamal Abdel Nasser dies of heart attack and is replaced by his Vice-President, Anwar el-Sadat.
In 1971 - Treaty of Friendship between Egypt and the Soviet Union is signed.

In 1971 - Egypt's new constitution is introduced and the country is renamed the 'Arab Republic of Egypt'.

In 1971 - The Aswan High Dam is completed. It proves to have a huge impact on irrigation, agriculture and industry in Egypt.

In October, 1973 - Egypt and Syria go to war with Israel during Israel's celebration of “Yom Kippur” to reclaim the land they lost in June 1967. Egypt begins negotiations for the return of Sinai after the war.

In June, 1975 - The Suez Canal is re-opened. It had been closed since the June, 1967 war.

In 1976 - Anwar el-Sadat ends the Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union.

In September, 1978 - Camp David Accords for peace with Israel are signed.

In March, 1979 - The peace treaty between Egypt and Israelis signed. Egypt is then condemned by other Arab nations and excluded Egypt from the Arab League.

In October 6, 1981 – President Anwar El-Sadat is assassinated by Jihadist army members.

A national referendum approves Air Marshal Mohammed Hosni Mubarak as the new president.

In October, 1987 - Mohammed Hosni Mubarak begins his second term.

In 1989 - Egypt rejoins the Arab League.

In October, 1993 – Mohammed Hosni Mubarak begins his third term in office after a Yes-No referendum.

In June, 1995 – President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak is the target of an assassination attempt in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, upon his arrival as guest at a summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).
In 1997 - Fifty-eight tourists are killed by gunmen in front of the Temple of Hatshepsut near Luxor. It is alleged that Egypt's Islamic Group (Jemaa Islamiya) is responsible.

In October, 1999 – Mohammed Hosni Mubarak begins his fourth term in office after approved by a yes – No referendum.

In December 2000 - Egypt, Lebanon and Syria agree on a billion-dollar project for a pipeline to carry Egyptian gas under the Mediterranean to the Lebanese port of Tripoli.

In February, 2002 - Hundreds of passengers are killed after their train catches fire south of Cairo.

In October, 2004- Bomb attacks target Israeli tourists on Sinai peninsula: 34 people are killed.

In November, 2004 - Funeral of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is held in Cairo.

In February-April 2005 - Pro-reform and opposition activists mount anti-government demonstrations.

In May, 2005 - Referendum vote backs a constitutional amendment that will allow multiple candidates to stand in presidential elections.

In July, 2005 - Scores of people are killed in bomb attacks in the Red Sea resort of Sharm al-Sheikh.

In September, 2005 - President Hosni Mubarak is re-elected for a fifth consecutive term.

In December, 2005 - Parliamentary polls end with clashes between police and supporters of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood. The National Democratic Party and its allies retain their large parliamentary majority. Muslim Brotherhood supporters, elected as independents, win a record 20% of seats.

More than 20 Sudanese migrants die after police break up a protest camp outside the UN offices in Cairo.

In February, 2006 - Up to 1,000 people die when a ferry carrying about 1,400 passengers from Saudi Arabia to Egypt sinks in the Red Sea.
In April, 2006 - Bomb attacks in the Red Sea resort of Dahab kill more than 20 people.

In August, 2006 - Egypt praises the way the guerrilla group Hezbollah held out in the war with Israel in Lebanon after earlier questioning its judgment.

In November, 2006 - Egypt is one of at least six Arab countries developing domestic nuclear programs to diversify energy sources, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports.

President Hosni Mubarak promises democratic and constitutional reform in an address to parliament. Opponents are skeptical.

In November, 2006 - Upsurge in arrests of Muslim Brotherhood members.

In March, 2007 - Referendum on constitutional amendments. The authorities say 76% of voters approve changes, opposition groups say the poll was rigged.

In April, 2007 - Amnesty International criticizes Egypt's record on torture and illegal detention.

More than 30 members of the Muslim Brotherhood go on trial, the first time in seven years that members of the group have been tried under military jurisdiction.

In June, 2007 - Parliamentary elections. Governing National Democratic Party wins most votes.

In October, 2007 - Independent, opposition newspapers protest against "government harassment" after seven journalists are imprisoned and an editor is put on trial.

Dustur newspaper editor Ibrahim Eissa sentenced to six months in jail for reporting rumors about President Mubarak’s health. Rights groups demand change to law on reporting "false information".

In April 2008 - Military courts sentence 25 leading Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwan Musleemin) members to jail terms in crackdown targeting the organization’s funding. More than 800 arrested over a month. Brotherhood boycotted municipal elections after only 20 candidates allowed to stand.

In November 2008 - The governing NDP says it will privatize some state firms and distribute free shares to citizens. State will retain majority
stakes in strategically important assets such as iron, steel, transport and tourism.

Security forces redeploy in Sinai after clashes over smuggling into Gaza Strip with local Bedouin left several tribesmen dead.

In February, 2009 - Leading opposition figure Ayman Nour freed after serving three years of five-year sentence on forgery charges that he said were politically motivated.

Bomb attack in popular tourist area of Cairo kills a French student and injures 24 other people. Authorities arrest three suspects, say small Islamist cell thought to be responsible.

In April, 2009 - Egyptian authorities say they arrested 49 people the previous year on suspicion of helping Hezbollah send money and aid to Hamas in Gaza.

In May 2009 - Egyptian police clash with Coptic Christian pig farmers trying to stop their animals being taken away for slaughter as a precaution against swine flu.

Interior Ministry says seven people with suspected links to al-Qaeda arrested in connection with Cairo bomb attack which killed a French student in February.

In June, 2009 - US President Barack Obama makes key speech in Cairo calling for a new beginning between the United States and the Muslim world.

In July, 2009 - Egyptian officials say 25 militants suspected of having al-Qaeda links were arrested for plotting attacks on ships in the Suez Canal.

In August, 2009 - Twenty-six members of an alleged cell of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah go on trial in Cairo on charges of plotting attacks in Egypt and helping to send weapons to Hamas in Gaza.

In November, 2009 - Row between Egypt and Algeria following violence at football matches.

In December, 2009 - Foreign activists protest in Cairo against Egypt's refusal to let aid convoys into Gaza.

In January, 2010 - Coptic Christians clash with police after an apparently sectarian shooting outside a church.
In February, 2010 - Former UN nuclear chief Mohammed El Baradei returns to Egypt and, together with opposition figures and activists, forms a coalition for political change. ElBaradei says he might run in presidential election scheduled for 2011.

In March, 2010 - President Mubarak undergoes gall-bladder surgery in Germany, returning to Egypt three weeks later.

In June, 2010 - Muslim Brotherhood fails to win any seats in elections to the Shura consultative upper house of parliament: alleges vote was rigged.

In November, 2010 - Coptic Christians clash with police in Giza over construction of church.

Parliamentary polls, followed by protests against alleged vote rigging. Muslim Brotherhood fails to win a single seat, though it held a fifth of the places in the last parliament.

In January, 2011 - 21 killed in bomb at church in Alexandria where Christians had gathered to mark the New Year.

Anti-government demonstrations, apparently encouraged by Tunisian street protests which prompted sudden departure of President Ben Ali.

President Hosni Mubarak reshuffles his cabinet but fails to placate demonstrators, whose calls for his resignation grow louder. Days later he promises to step down in September.

In February, 2011 - President Hosni Mubarak steps down and hands power to the army council.

In March, 2011 - Egyptians approve package of constitutional reforms aimed at paving the way for new elections.

In April, 2011 - Former President Hosni Mubarak and his sons, Ala and Gamal, are arrested on suspicion of corruption.

In April, 2011 April-August - Protests continue in Cairo's Tahrir Square over slow pace of political change. Islamist groups come to the fore. Army finally disperses protestors in August.

In August, 2011 - Former President Hosni Mubarak goes on trial in Cairo, charged with ordering the killing of demonstrators earlier in the year.
In October, 2011 - Clashes between Coptic Christians and security forces kill 24 people.

Egypt and Israel swap 25 Egyptians in Israeli custody for a US-Israeli citizen accused of spying.

In November, 2011 - Violence in Cairo's Tahrir square as security forces clash with protesters accusing the military of trying to keep their grip on power. Prime Minister Essam Sharaf resigns in response to the unrest. Start of parliamentary elections.

In December, 2011 - National unity government headed by new Prime Minister Kamal al-Ganzouri takes office.

In January, 2012 - Islamist parties emerge as victors of drawn-out parliamentary elections.

In March, 2012 - Pope Shenouda III, the veteran head of the Coptic Church, dies.

In April, 2012 - Crisis in relations with Saudi Arabia over the Saudi detention of an Egyptian lawyer briefly threatens the substantial aid that the Saudis provide Egypt.

In May, 2012 - Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwan Musleemin) candidate Mohammed Morsi tops the first round of voting in first free presidential elections, narrowly ahead of Mubarak-era prime minister Ahmed Shafiq. Official media put turnout at a low 43%.

Military leaders announce the end of the state of emergency in place since Anwar al-Sadat's assassination in 1981, as its last renewal expires.

In June, 2012 - Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammed Morsi narrowly wins presidential election.

Court sentences ex-President Mubarak to life in prison for complicity in the killing of protesters during the 2011 uprising.

In July, 2012 - President Mohammed Morsi submits to a Supreme Court ruling that the parliamentary elections were invalid, after initially ordering parliament to meet in defiance of a military decree dissolving it in June.

In August, 2012 - New prime minister Hisham Qandil appoints a cabinet dominated by figures from the outgoing government, technocrats and Islamists, excluding secular and liberal forces.
Islamist fighters attack an army outpost in Sinai, killing 16 soldiers, and mount a brief incursion into Israel, highlighting the tenuousness of government control over the largely-lawless area.

President Mohammed Morsi dismisses Defense Minister Tantawi and Chief of Staff Sami Annan and strips military of say in legislation and drafting the new constitution.

In September, 2012 - Egypt kills 32 militants and destroys 31 smuggling tunnels to Gaza in an offensive against militants who attacked troops in Sinai in August.

In November, 2012 - Bishop Tawadros is chosen as the new pope of Egypt's Coptic Christians.

President Mohammed Morsi issues a decree stripping the judiciary of the right to challenge his decisions, but rescinds it in the face of popular protests.

In December, 2012 - Islamist-dominated constituent assembly approves draft constitution that boosts the role of Islam and restricts freedom of speech and assembly. Public approve it in a referendum, prompting extensive protest by secular opposition leaders, Christians and women's groups.

Government paralysis weakens the currency and delays a $4.8bn (£3bn) IMF loan.

In January, 2013 - More than 50 people are killed during days of violent street protests. The army chief warns that political strife is pushing the state to the brink of collapse.

March, 2013 - A court halts President Mohammed Morsi's plans to bring parliamentary elections forward to April, citing failure to refer the electoral law to the Constitutional Court. The main opposition National Salvation Front had announced a poll boycott earlier.

April 13, 2013: Mohammed Hosni Mubarak: Profile updates:

Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt for almost 30 years until he was swept from power in a wave of mass protests in February 2011.

Few expected that the little-known vice-president who was elevated to the presidency in the wake of Anwar Sadat's 1981 assassination would hold on to the country's top job for so long.
Mr Sadat was assassinated by Islamist militants at a military parade in Cairo, and Mr Mubarak was lucky to escape the shots as he sat next to him. Mubarak became Egypt's fourth president after the killing of Anwar Sadat.

Since then, he has survived at least six assassination attempts - the narrowest escape shortly after his arrival in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, in 1995 to attend an African summit, when his limousine came under attack.

Besides his knack for dodging bullets, the former air force commander has also managed to keep a hold on power by positioning himself as a trusted Western ally and fighting off a powerful opposition movement at home.

But with domestic unrest, his regional clout waning, his health failing, and his succession unclear, many questioned how long Mr Mubarak would be able to carry on.

Then, in a televised address on 1 February, following mass protests in Cairo and other cities, Mr Mubarak announced he had decided not to stand for re-election in September.

Protests continued and on 10 February he appeared on state television to say he was handing over powers to his vice-president, but would remain as president.

The following day Vice-President Omar Suleiman made a terse announcement saying Mr Mubarak was stepping down and the military's supreme council would run the country.

By 24 May, judicial officials announced that Mr Mubarak, along with his two sons - Alaa and Gamal - would stand trial over the deaths of anti-government protesters.

On 2 June he was found guilty of complicity in the murder of some of the demonstrators who took part in the wave of protests that began on 25 January. Along with his former Interior Minister, Habib Al-Adly, he was sentenced to life imprisonment for his crimes.

In January 2013, Egypt's Court of Cassation allowed an appeal against Mubarak's and al-Adly's convictions and ordered a retrial. Mubarak and his sons will also be retried on corruption charges for which they were acquitted.
The new trial was scheduled to begin on 13 April but as it was about to start, the presiding judge said he felt "unease" and was recusing himself. He referred the case to Cairo's appeals court to select a new panel of judges.

Early life:

Born in 1928 in a small village at Menofya province near Cairo, he insists on keeping his private life out of the public domain.

Married to a half-British graduate of the American University in Cairo, Suzanne Mubarak, and with two sons, Gamal and Alaa, the Egyptian president had been known to lead a strict life with a fixed daily schedule that began at 0600.

Never a smoker or a drinker, he built himself a reputation as a fit man who leads a healthy life.

In his younger days, close associates often complained of the president's schedule, which began with a workout in the gym or a game of squash.

Mohammed Hosni Sayyid Mubarak was sworn in on 14 October 1981, eight days after the Anwar Sadat assassination.

Despite having little popular appeal or international profile at the time, the burly military man used his sponsorship of the issue behind Sadat's killing - peace with Israel - to build up his reputation as an international statesman.

Emergency rule:

In effect, Hosni Mubarak ruled as a quasi-military leader when he took power.

For his entire period in office, he kept the country under emergency law, giving the state sweeping powers of arrest and curbing basic freedoms.

The government argued the draconian regime was necessary to combat Islamist terrorism, which came in waves during the decades of Mr Mubarak's rule - often targeting Egypt's lucrative tourism sector.

He presided over a period of domestic stability and economic development that meant most of his fellow countrymen accepted his monopolization of power in Egypt.
In recent years, Mr Mubarak felt for the first time the pressure to encourage democracy, both from within Egypt, and from his most powerful ally, the United States.

Many supporters of reform doubted the veteran ruler’s sincerity when he said he was all for opening up the political process.

Leading up to his declaration not to stand again for the presidency, the US had heaped pressure on him to stand aside, calling for an "orderly transition" of power to a more democratic system.

Mr Mubarak won three elections unopposed since 1981, but for his fourth contest in 2005 - after a firm push from the US - he changed the system to allow rival candidates.

Critics said the election was heavily weighted in favor of Mr Mubarak and the National Democratic Party (NDP). They accused the Egyptian leader of presiding over a sustained campaign of suppressing opposition groups, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood.

The length of his tenure, along with his age and possible successors, had all been sensitive subjects in Egypt until January and February's mass protests allowed the Egyptian people to find a voice.

People around Mr Mubarak said his health and vigor belied his age - although a couple of recent health scares have been a reminder of his mortality.

Rumors about the president's health gathered pace when he travelled to Germany in March 2010 for gall bladder surgery. They flared every time he missed a key gathering or disappeared from the media spotlight for any conspicuous length of time.

However much Egyptian officials tried to deny them, they kept circulating, with reports in the Israeli and pan-Arab media.

The days of mass protests in Egyptian cities prompted Mr Mubarak to finally name a vice-president. On 29 January, intelligence chief Omar Suleiman was elevated to the role in what was seen as an attempt by Mr Mubarak to bolster his support in the military.

Until then there had been no obvious successor but opposition groups had feared his son, 40-year-old former investment banker Gamal Mubarak,
was being groomed for a kind of dynastic inheritance dressed up as a
democratic transition.

Gamal insisted he had no ambition to be president, but he had been
moving steadily up the ranks of the NDP, becoming a leading advocate of
economic and political reform.

Historians point out that every president since the revolution of 1952 has
come from the military, and Gamal's civilian credentials may have given
him trouble in gaining the support of that important constituency.

In the past, Mr Mubarak had said he would continue to serve Egypt until
his last breath. In his speech on 1 February, he said: "This dear nation...
is where I lived, I fought for it and defended its soil, sovereignty and
interests. On its soil I will die. History will judge me like it did others."

Text ends

April 17, 2013: Egypt's Mohammed Hosni Mubarak ordered back to prison'

Former Egyptian President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak has been ordered
back to prison from military hospital. Mr Mubarak's retrial will open again
on 11th May, a Cairo appeals court says. He is charged alongside his
former interior minister and six former security chiefs with complicity in
the murder and attempted murder of hundreds of protesters in January
2011. The retrial was meant to begin on 13 April but collapsed when the
presiding judge withdrew from the case. AFP news agency quotes judicial
sources as saying that Judge Mahmud al-Rashidi will preside over the case
at the North Cairo Criminal Court.

Life sentence: Mr Mubarak will also face a retrial or corruption charges,
along with his sons, Alaa and Gamal, and businessman Hussein Salem.
They were found not guilty the first time round. Mr Mubarak was convicted
last June of conspiring to kill protesters during the 2011 revolt. He was
sentenced to life in prison. However, a retrial was ordered in January after
he appealed against the sentence, with the court citing "procedural
failings". The retrial began on 13 April, but presiding Judge Mustafa
Hassan Abdullah withdrew immediately, stating his "unease" about
reviewing the case. A court ruled Mr Mubarak could no longer be held in
prison on the charges related to the killings of protesters. His lawyer
successfully argued that he had spent the maximum time in prison under
temporary detention. However, he remains in custody on the corruption
charges. The former leader has been in poor health since his arrest and
appeared on a stretcher during his first trial and at the 13 April hearing.
About 850 people were killed in the crackdown during the 2011 uprising that ended Mr Mubarak's rule. Deaths during the uprising were largely blamed on the police at the time, but a recent leaked report implicated the army in serious human rights abuses, including the killing and torture of protesters. The leaked chapter, reportedly presented to President Mohammed Morsi late last year, contains testimony relating to civilians detained at military checkpoints who were never seen again and reports that the army delivered unidentified bodies to coroners. Egypt's Defense Minister Abdel Fatah al-Sissi denied the accusations, calling them a betrayal.

FLASHBACK: Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (Hizb al-Islami) Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood as of December 2013

Muslim Brotherhood (Ahwa Muslimeen): is Egypt's oldest and largest Islamist organisation

Founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928. Has influenced Islamist movements worldwide. Mixes political activism with charity work. Rejects use of violence and supports democratic principles. Wants to create a state governed by Islamic law. It's Slogan: "Islam is the solution"

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood is perhaps facing the most serious crisis in its 85-year history.

President Mohammed Morsi, a member of the group, was ousted by the military, senior leaders and thousands of members have been detained, and its headquarters have been ransacked and burned.

Protest camps set up in the capital Cairo to call for his reinstatement have been stormed by Egyptian security forces with great loss of life. The Brotherhood described the action - which brought international condemnation - as "a massacre".

In December, the interim Egyptian government declared the group a "terrorist organisation", blaming it for a string of attacks, which the Brotherhood denied.

The movement is the country's oldest and largest Islamist organisation, meaning its ideology is based on the teachings of the Koran.

Founded by Hassan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood - or al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun in Arabic - has influenced Islamist movements around the world with its model of political activism combined with Islamic charity work.
The movement initially aimed simply to spread Islamic morals and good works, but soon became involved in politics, particularly the fight to rid Egypt of British colonial control and cleanse it of all Western influence.

While the Ikhwan say that they support democratic principles, one of the group's stated aims is to create a state ruled by Islamic law, or Sharia. Its most famous slogan, used worldwide, is: "Islam is the solution."

Paramilitary wing

After Banna launched the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, branches were set up throughout the country - each running a mosque, a school and a sporting club - and its membership grew rapidly.

By the late 1940s, the group is estimated to have had 500,000 members in Egypt, and its ideas had spread across the Arab world.

At the same time, Banna created a paramilitary wing, the Special Apparatus, whose operatives joined the fight against British rule and engaged in a campaign of bombings and assassinations.

The Egyptian government dissolved the group in late 1948 for attacking British and Jewish interests. Soon afterwards, the group was accused of assassinating Prime Minister Mahmoud al-Nuqrashi.

Banna denounced the killing, but he was subsequently shot dead by an unknown gunman - believed to have been a member of the security forces.

In 1952, colonial rule came to an end following a military coup d'état led by a group of young officers calling themselves the Free Officers.

The Ikhwan played a supporting role - Anwar al-Sadat, who became president in 1970, was once the Free Officers' liaison with them - and initially co-operated with the new government, but relations soon soured.

After a failed attempt to assassinate President Gamal Abdul Nasser in 1954, the Ikhwan were blamed, banned, and thousands of members imprisoned and tortured. The group continued, however, to grow underground.

This clash with the authorities prompted an important shift in the ideology of the Ikhwan, evident in the writing of one prominent member, Sayyid Qutb.
Qutb's work advocated the use of jihad (struggle) against jahili (ignorant) societies, both Western and so-called Islamic ones, which he argued were in need of radical transformation.

His writings - particularly the 1964 work Milestones - inspired the founders of many radical Islamist groups, including Islamic Jihad and al-Qaeda.

In 1965, the government again cracked down on the Ikhwan, executing Qutb in 1966 and transforming him into a martyr for many people across the region.

Crackdown

During the 1980s, the Ikhwan attempted to rejoin the political mainstream.

Successive leaders formed alliances with the Wafd party in 1984, and with the Socialist Labour Party and the Socialist Liberals Party in 1987, becoming the main opposition force in Egypt. In 2000, the Ikhwan won 17 seats in the lower house of parliament, the People's Assembly.

Five years later, the group achieved its best election result up to then, with independent candidates allied to it winning 20% of the seats.

The result shocked President Hosni Mubarak. The government subsequently launched a crackdown on the Ikhwan, detaining hundreds of members, and instituted a number of legal "reforms" to counter their resurgence.

The constitution was rewritten to stipulate that "political activity or political parties shall not be based on any religious background or foundation": independent candidates were banned from running for president: and anti-terrorism legislation that gave the security forces sweeping powers to detain suspects and restrict public gatherings was introduced.

At the beginning of 2011, anti-government demonstrations, apparently encouraged by the Tunisian street protests which prompted the sudden departure of Tunisia's President Ben Ali, kicked off across the country.

Though many members of the Ikhwan joined the protests, they maintained a low profile. The group's traditional slogans were not seen in Cairo's Tahrir Square.
But as the protests grew and the government began to offer concessions, including a promise by Mr Mubarak not to seek re-election in September 2011, Egypt's largest opposition force took a more assertive role.

Rising power

In the first parliamentary elections after Mr Mubarak's overthrow in February 2011, the Ikhwan's newly formed Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) won nearly half the seats in the People's Assembly, eclipsing the earlier performances of independents allied to the movement.

The ultraconservative Salafist Nour party came second, meaning that Islamists controlled 70% of the seats in the lower house. There was a similar outcome from elections for the upper house, the Shura Council.

This allowed the Ikhwan and their allies to control the selection of candidates for the 100-member constituent assembly tasked with drafting Egypt's new constitution, prompting criticism from liberals, secularists, Coptic Christians, young people and women, who complained that the panel did not reflect the diversity of Egyptian society.

Concerns that the Ikhwan might be seeking to monopolise power were heightened when they announced they would field a candidate in the presidential election, despite having previously promised they would not.

In 2012, the FJP's then chairman, Mohammed Morsi, became Egypt's first democratically elected president. He won 51% of the vote in a deeply polarising run-off against retired air force commander Ahmed Shafiq.

Mr Morsi sought to reassure opponents of the Ikhwan by insisting that as president he wanted to build a "democratic, civil and modern state" that guaranteed the freedom of religion and right to peaceful protest.

Overthrow

Significant public opposition to Mr Morsi and the Ikhwan began building in November 2012.

Wishing to ensure that the constituent assembly could finish drafting the new constitution, the president issued an interim constitutional declaration granting himself far-reaching powers. He agreed to limit the scope of the declaration after days of opposition protests, but there was further outrage at the end of that month when the constituent assembly approved a rushed version of the constitution - despite a boycott by liberals,
secularists and the Coptic Church, who said it failed to protect freedom of expression and religion.

As opposition mounted, President Morsi issued a decree authorising the armed forces to protect national institutions and polling places until a referendum on the draft constitution was held in December 2012, which critics said amounted to a form of martial law.

The army returned to barracks after the charter was approved, but within weeks it was forced to deploy in cities along the Suez Canal to halt deadly clashes between opponents and supporters of Mr Morsi and the Ikhwan. At the end of January 2013, the military warned that the political crisis might "lead to a collapse of the state".

In late April, opposition activists set up the grassroots Tamarod (Rebel) protest movement. It focused on collecting signatures for a petition, which complained about Mr Morsi's failure to restore security and fix the economy, and accused him of putting the Brotherhood's interests ahead of the country's as a whole. Tamarod also organised mass protests to mark the first anniversary of the day Mr Morsi took office. On 30 June 2013, millions of people took to the streets to demand his resignation.

The unrest and rising death toll prompted the military to warn Mr Morsi on 1 July that it would intervene and imposes its own "roadmap" if he did not satisfy the public's demands within 48 hours and end the political crisis.

On 3 July, the military deployed troops and armoured vehicles in the streets. It declared that the constitution had been suspended and the chief justice of the SCC would assume presidential powers, overthrowing Mr Morsi.

The Ikhwan denounced the "military coup against the elected president and the will of the nation", and vowed that they would refuse to deal with Egypt's interim leaders.

Brotherhood supporters set up protest camps in Nahda Square and near the Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque and refused to disband them, despite repeated calls by the interim government.

After weeks of deadlock, hopes rose that the protests would remain peaceful. However, on 14 August security forces swept into the camps and the authorities imposed a state of national emergency.

Who's who in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood'
Many leading members of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood were detained as part of the crackdown on the organisation following the overthrow and arrest of President Mohammed Morsi in July. Some initially evaded arrest but were detained later.

Other members have come to represent the public face of the Islamist movement by appearing at pro-Morsi rallies or in international media. Here are some of the movement's key figures:

Mohammed Badie

Mohammed Badie is the Muslim Brotherhood's General Guide and in theory its leading figure.

He was born in al-Mahalla al-Kubra, north of Cairo, in 1943, and is a veterinary pathologist by training. He has taught in several Egyptian universities.

He held a number of administrative roles in the Brotherhood and served lengthy jail terms for his political activities, before assuming the leadership in 2010.

In the early stages of the protests, he appeared on the main stage of the Brotherhood's sit-in in Cairo. His remark in late July that "overthrowing Morsi was more criminal than carrying an axe and demolishing the Kaaba in Mecca" stirred controversy. His arrest was ordered on 10 July on charges of inciting the killing of anti-Morsi protesters, and a travel ban was put in place.

He went on the run but was arrested on 20 August, days after his son, Ammar, was killed in the Cairo unrest.

Mahmoud Ezzat

A leading figure in the Brotherhood since the 1960s, Mahmoud Ezzat has been described as "the gatekeeper" of the group's finances and secrets.

He joined the Brotherhood when he was 18 years old and rose through the ranks to become deputy guide in 2010. Described by Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram as a "hardliner" within the organisation, he has been imprisoned several times and served time alongside other members, including Mr Badie and Khairat al-Shatir.
He was made temporary leader of the Brotherhood following the arrest of Mr Badie in August.

Despite his leading role, he has kept a low profile and in December 2012 was singled out as the organisation's "most dangerous man" by academic Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim, who described him as a "big enigma".

Khairat al-Shatatir

The engineer, businessman and Islamist political activist has been seen as one of the group's most influential figures.

Imprisoned under former President Hosni Mubarak, he was the Brotherhood's initial candidate in last year's presidential elections before being disqualified by the election commission.

He is the deputy General Guide and thought to be a main financier of the group.

Mr Shatatir was arrested on 5 July 2013, after Mohammed Morsi was ousted, and his assets frozen.

Mohammed al-Beltagi

The secretary-general of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and former MP was an activist on board the ship the Mavi Marmara during the 2010 Gaza flotilla raid.

On 10 July, prosecutors ordered Mr Beltagi’s arrest, and four days later they ordered that his financial assets be frozen.

Despite the arrest order, Mr Beltagi appeared on an almost daily basis at the Rabaa al-Adawiyah sit-in, delivering fiery speeches on the stage.

He was eventually detained in a suburb of Giza on 29 August.

Criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian media has focused on Mr Beltagi, who has been accused of being behind acts of violence allegedly perpetrated by Brotherhood members.

Gehad al-Haddad

The son of Mr Morsi's foreign affairs adviser Isam al-Haddad, Mr Haddad is a senior adviser and media spokesman for the Brotherhood. He studied at De Montfort University in the UK and is fluent in English.
Mr Haddad served as media strategist for Mr Morsi's presidential campaign in 2011, and is active with foreign media, giving interviews in English for BBC World, Sky News, The Guardian and CNN, and tweeting as @gelhaddad.

He was arrested in Cairo on 17 September.

Ahmad Arif

The Brotherhood's Arabic media spokesman is a dentist and an expert in Islamic and Christian theology. His appointment was well-received by the media, given his soft tone and moderate style, which earned him regular spots on TV talk shows.

Mr Arif appeared regularly at the Rabaa sit-in, delivering speeches from the stage. He was detained by security services on 22 August.

Abd-al-Rahman al-Barr

Often described as the "Muslim Brotherhood's Mufti", Mr Barr is the organisation's most senior religious figure and a member of the Brotherhood’s Guidance Bureau. He has not been detained and has often led prayers at pro-Morsi sit-ins.

Essam el-Erian

A vice-chairman of the FJP and former member of the Guidance Bureau, Essam el-Erian was arrested on 30 October, after evading authorities for months.

While in hiding, Mr Erian urged Muslim Brotherhood supporters to keep up protests against the military and demand Mohammed Morsi's reinstatement.

A regular guest in domestic and foreign media before the crackdown, he stirred controversy over remarks in which he called Israel "a racist, invading entity that commits war crimes" and urged Egyptian Jews in Israel to come back.

He also drew criticism over remarks quoted in Al-Ahram, reportedly saying: "Tell [the UAE] that nuclear Iran is coming... The Persians are coming, not the Egyptians, and you will become slaves of the Persians."

(Text ends)
January 2011 - Anti-Mubarak protests leave hundreds dead

February 2011 - President Mubarak overthrown after almost 30 years of rule

June 2012 - Former leader sentenced to life for killings of protesters during the uprisings

January 2013 - Retrial is ordered because of "procedural failings"

13 April, 2013 - Retrial begins but presiding judge immediately withdraws from the case

15 April 2013 - Court rules Mr Hosni Mubarak can no longer be held on charges related to killings of protesters

May 29th, 2013: Egypt summons Ethiopia’s ambassador to express displeasure with construction of a major dam on the Blue Nile’ (Ahram Online) – Egypt’s foreign ministry on Wednesday summoned Ethiopian Ambassador Mahmoud Dardir to express its displeasure with Ethiopia’s construction of a major dam on the Blue Nile. Head of the ministry’s African affairs committee, Ambassador Ali Hefny, along with other diplomats, met with Dardir Wednesday to convey Egypt’s unhappiness with the move. Egyptian diplomats further criticized Ethiopia for going ahead with the project without taking into account the recommendations of a technical committee – tasked with studying the issue – consisting of ten specialists, including representatives of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia.

In an interview with Ahram Online, Egyptian ambassador to Ethiopia Mohamed Idris stated that Egypt was pursuing a “win-win scenario in which the interests of both sides can be served and accommodated. ” Idris added: “We’re expecting Ethiopian officials to make good on their earlier promise to act in a way that would not harm Egyptian interests.” A report on the possible impact of Ethiopia’s ‘Renaissance Dam’ is expected to be issued later this week by the committee of specialists. Sources close to the committee say the report will include concerns over the potential impact of the dam on Egypt and Sudan. It is also expected to refer to worries that cracks could develop in the dam within a few years, eventually leading to serious flooding.

Ethiopia on Tuesday began diverting the course of the Blue Nile, one of the Nile River’s two major tributaries, as part of its project to build a series of new dams for electricity production. The move, called “historic” by Ethiopian government spokesperson Bereket Simon, has prompted
criticism from downstream Egypt and Sudan, since the step could negatively affect both countries’ water quotas. The Blue Nile provides Egypt with the lion’s share of its annual 55 billion cubic meters of river water. According to the state-run National Planning Institute, Egypt will need an additional 21 billion cubic meters of water per year by 2050 – on top of its current quota of 55 billion meters – to meet the needs of a projected population of 150 million. Source: http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent ... Nile-.aspx

May 30, 2013: Ethiopia dam is ‘declaration of war’: Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya

Ahram Online: Sheikh Abdel-Akher Hammad calls on Egypt to defend its honor and oppose construction of Ethiopian dam. Ethiopia’s Renaissance Dam and the diversion of the Blue Nile is a declaration of war on Egypt, Sheikh Abdel-Akher Hammad of Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya said on Wednesday. On Tuesday, Ethiopia began diverting the course of the Blue Nile, one of the Nile River’s two major tributaries, as part of its project to build a dam for electricity production.

Speaking on Al-Arabiya satellite channel, Hammad claimed the move would reduce Egypt’s water supply and damage national security. “If such a war is forged against us, we are ready to fight and we will embark on it with all our strength to defend our honor,” asserted Hammad. Diplomatic negotiations should be the first step, he added. Hammad went on to say the crisis should have been dealt with by the Mubarak regime. The Blue Nile provides Egypt with the lion’s share of its annual 55 billion cubic meters of river water. According to the state-run National Planning Institute, Egypt will need an additional 21 billion cubic meters of water per year by 2050 – on top of its current quota of 55 billion meters – to meet the needs of a projected population of 150 million.

May 30, 2013: Sudan, Egypt meet over Ethiopia Nile Dam impact’

Bloomberg: Ethiopia’s government said it will try to accommodate nations concerned that their water supplies may be affected by the damming of the Blue Nile River, as Sudanese and Egyptian officials met to discuss the issue. Ethiopia, source of one of the two tributaries of the Nile River, will start filling the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile at the “end of next year,” Deputy Prime Minister Debretsion Gebremichael said in an interview yesterday. The 80 billion-birr ($4.3 billion) hydropower project may begin generating 600 megawatts of electricity next year and is set for completion in 2017, he said. The schedule for filling the 74 billion
A cubic meter reservoir is expected to be a “major concern” for the downstream nations of Egypt and Sudan, said Debretsion. Once completed, the power plant will be Africa’s largest with the capacity to generate 6,000 megawatts. Egypt, which relies on the Nile for almost all of its water, has historically opposed upstream projects on the world’s longest river. “We are not selfish, we are not only looking at our national interest,” said Debretsion, who is also chairman of the state-owned Ethiopian Electric Power Corp. “This is an international river and we will try our best to accommodate their benefits and their interests.”

Seeking Assurance: Sudanese Water Resources and Electricity Minister Osama Abdalla Mohamed al-Hassan arrived in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, today to discuss the issue with Egyptian officials, the state-run Middle East News Agency reported. Egypt’s government and public are concerned that the dam may decrease the flow of the Nile, Mohamed Edrees, Egypt’s ambassador to Ethiopia, said in a phone interview today from Addis Ababa. “Our concern is for it not to affect our water security, to harm the water coming to Egypt,” he said. “How to do it effectively on the ground and how to implement it, this is something to be left to the technicians to discuss and agree on.” The dam, which will be twice the size of Singapore, will be full in “five to six years,” Ethiopian Water and Energy Minister Alemayehu Tegenu said at a ceremony to celebrate the diversion of the river yesterday in Guba, 454 kilometers (282 kilometers) northwest of Addis Ababa. “We won’t fill the reservoir at one go,” he said.

‘Broad Understanding’ Sudan’s government has had consultations with Ethiopia and Egypt and there is a “broad understanding on the issue,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Abu-Bakr al-Siddiq said in a phone interview today from Khartoum, the capital. “We don’t have any problem with what the Ethiopians have done,” he said. Edrees said the diversion has no “direct implication” as it doesn’t alter the flow of the river. A technical committee made up of neutral experts and four representatives each from Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt is expected to deliver a report on the project in a “few days,” Edrees said. “Actual dam construction” can start after the diversion was carried out a “few days ago,” said Debretsion. The altering of the course was a milestone in the project as “we managed to direct Abay on our own side,” Alemayehu said, using the Amharic name for the Nile. Members of the Ethiopian public have bought bonds worth more than 5 billion birr so far to pay for the dam, which will be financed from domestic sources only, Bereket Simon, who heads a fund-raising council for the project, said in an interview at the site yesterday.
Egyptians up in arms as Ethiopia builds giant hydro dam on Nile River: minister rules out war’

CAIRO — AP May 30, 2013: Ethiopia’s construction of Africa’s largest hydroelectric dam on the world’s longest river threatens to affect flows of water to Nile-dependent, water-starved Egypt, where there is growing outrage, anger and fear. Egypt in the past has threatened to go to war over its “historic rights” to Nile River water but diplomats from both countries this week played down the potential for conflict. “A military solution for the Nile River crisis is ruled out,” Egypt’s irrigation and water resources minister, Mohammed Baheddin, said Thursday amid newspaper reports recalling the threats of war from Egypt’s two previous leaders, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak. Ethiopia on Tuesday started diverting the flow of the Blue Nile for construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Eighty-five percent of Nile waters originate in Ethiopia yet the East African nation whose name has become synonymous with famine thus far utilizes very little of those waters.

Ethiopia’s decision challenges a colonial-era agreement that had given downstream Egypt and Sudan rights to the Nile water, with Egypt taking 55.5 billion cubic meters and Sudan 18.5 billion cubic meters of 84 billion cubic meters, with 10 billion lost to evaporation. That agreement, first signed in 1929, took no account of the eight other nations along the 6,700-kilometer (4,160-mile) river and its basin, which have been agitating for a decade for a more equitable accord. And Ethiopia’s unilateral action seems to ignore the 10-nation Nile Basin Initiative to promote cooperation. Ethiopia is leading five nations threatening to sign a new cooperation agreement without Egypt and Sudan, effectively taking control from Egypt of the Nile, which serves some 238 million people. Mohammed Abdel-Qader, governor of Egypt’s Gharbiya province in the Nile Delta, warned the dam spells “disaster” and is a national security issue for the North African nation.

“Taking Egypt’s share of water is totally rejected ... The Nile means everything to Egypt,” said Gov. Abdel-Qader. Baheddin said Egypt already is suffering “water poverty” with an individual’s share of 640 cubic meters well below the international average of 1,000 cubic meters. Egypt protests that others along the Nile have alternative water sources, while the Nile is the sole water source in the mainly desert country. Ethiopian officials say the dam is needed to provide much-needed power for development. At a ceremony marking the diversion of the Nile, Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnin said Ethiopia could export cheap electricity from the
dam to energy-short Egypt and Sudan. He insisted the dam would not affect the flow of water to Egypt.

Experts say otherwise.

Alaa el-Zawahri, a dams engineer at Cairo University and an expert on a national committee studying the ramifications of the Ethiopian dam, said Egypt stands to lose about 15 billion cubic meters of water — 27 percent of annual share — each of the five years that Ethiopia has said it will take to fill the dam. The country’s current share already is insufficient.

January 27, 2013: Egypt's Mohammed Morsi declares state of emergency in three cities: Egypt on the verge of collapse' Sinai which is 85% its residents are Palestinian origins sees itself not part of Egypt. Technically Egypt has no full control over Sinai based on the 1982 Camp David agreement. From 1967-1982 it was part of Israel. The Israeli Military withdraw from Sinai with agreement Egypt would never ever has any military presence in Sinai which is Eastern part of the Suez Canal.

Port Said which is the Economic heart of Egypt and a very strategic location in a very strategic and volatile region declared independent from the Muslim government in Egypt that is on the way to destroy Egypt first and then the region as a whole. Other cities and towns alongside the Suez including Suez city and Ismailia are also declared independent from the Muslim government in Egypt. They also rejected the IMF lending money to Egypt which is 4.8 billion and the promises EU aid money which is 5 billion would be used for investment alongside the Suez Canal.

Especially the Mubarak era Egypt's Military that was a state with in a state and controlling 45% of Egypt's wealth is inflaming the situation including stopping investment alongside the Suez canal by foreigners and Egyptian civilians knowing if it is going to happen, the military will lose the Military bases and resources there. All cities and towns alongside the Suez and south of the Cairo including the 5 different Ethnic groups of Nubians, Bejas and Berbers in Egypt still are Mubarak's supporters and against the Muslim rule. Saudi Arabia media is loudly talking about Egypt saying "we gave them religion, we gave them language and we are giving them money worth Billions and its will continue. We also are sheltering 1.5 million Egyptians. What do these people want more". Saudi and other Gulf nations are undermining and disrespecting Egypt down under to their bare feet.
The point is that Egypt is in a mess. It is just the beginning. Those 10s of millions of youth are graduated but never had a job. Only 4.5% Egypt's territory is for human as well as animals and plants use including for settlement. The rest is dead desert. 98% their entire water consumption including agriculture is coming from the Nile where between 86-95% based on the rainy season is originated from the Ethiopian highland. Since 1982, Egypt is getting 1.3 billion worth military budget from USA every year which is about 40 Billion USA dollars in total. One week ago, they gave them 20 F-16 and 200 thanks.

However, all is nothing but Egypt is at war within itself. The situation will get worse than better. No nation will get peace and development as long as any religion especially fundamental Islam is ruling under the Islamic law that was in the 7th century and created by the al-Qaida types of the time which were primitive people with savage mentality and gruesome actions. Egyptians must fight the Muslim Brotherhood and other radical Islam and its foreign supporters until the people win the battle. Unless it will be too late and the situation in Egypt will be the real hell for many years to come and there will be many innocent suffering.

June 4, 2013: A senior aide of Egypt’s President Mohamed Morsi has apologized for one of the most public diplomatic and political mistakes committed by anyone in recent years. The aide neglected to tell politicians meeting with President Morsi to discuss Ethiopia’s Blue Nile River dam projects that the meeting was being broadcast live on state television. At the meeting several participants, unaware that the world was watching and listening, openly suggested ways for Egypt to sabotage Ethiopia’s dams, in particular the $4.2 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The GERD is about 15 kilometers from the Ethiopia-Sudan border. The president and the politicians were discussing a report by the tripartite Egypt-Sudan-Ethiopia commission analyzing the impact of Ethiopia's dam project and its decision to divert the Blue Nile River. Ethiopia has already partially diverted the Blue Nile at the site of the GERD. One political leader, Yunis Makhyun, a member of the Islamist fundamentalist Nur Party, called the GERD a strategic threat to Egypt. He thought the Egyptian government should consider supporting an Ethiopian rebel group, in order to pressure the Ethiopian government. Ayman Nour, a member of the liberal-secular Ghad Party, suggested Egypt buy or circulate rumors that it will buy new military aircraft (implying ne strike aircraft that could hit the dam). He speculated that this would put political pressure on Ethiopia. He also said that Egyptian political, military, and intelligence personnel might be sent to Ethiopia to “intervene” in Ethiopian
domestic politics. Egypt claims 87 percent of the Nile River’s water. The legal basis of this claim is a 1929 colonial-era agreement. In 1959 the Nasser government reiterated this claim. Egypt claims the right to veto upstream river projects. Ethiopia says it was not a party to the 1929 agreement. Since the public vetting of these belligerent options, the Egyptian government has stated that none of the recommendations, suggestions, or speculations by the political leaders at the meeting are Egyptian government policy. (Austin Bay)

June 5, 2013: The Egyptian government demanded that Ethiopia stop construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile. The demand amounts to doubling down. After an open microphone caught senior Egyptian leaders discussing covert actions against Ethiopia, Egypt was initially embarrassed. However, protecting the Nile has proved to be a domestic political issue that unites most Egyptians.

June 7, 2013: Ethiopia rejected Egyptian demands that it cease construction of its Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project on the Blue Nile River. The government said that Egypt’s complaints about the dam were not based on scientific evidence. Ethiopia also contended that Egypt lacks a coherent policy regarding Nile River water rights. A government spokesman accused the former Egyptian government led by Hosni Mubarak of supporting Ethiopian rebel groups and claimed that Mubarak’s attempts to destabilize Ethiopia had failed.

June 9, 2013: Egypt rejected Ethiopia’s rejection of the Egyptian demand that Ethiopia cease construction of its major Blue Nile dam projects. The government of Egypt said that Egypt will never give up a single drop of Nile River water. The Egyptian government declared that it has a plan of action. However, Egypt is willing to talk with Ethiopia.

June 10, 2013: Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi said that he does not want to go to war with Ethiopia but unless Ethiopia suspends its dam construction projects Egypt will consider “all options.” The Ethiopian government issued an immediate reply and said that Ethiopia is prepared to defend the new Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

June 11, 2013: The Ethiopian government refused to stop work on any of its new dam projects. Ethiopia accused Egypt of making irresponsible threats.
June 12, 2013: A senior Egyptian defense official stated that the escalating disagreement between his country and Ethiopia over Nile River water flow “is not a military issue at this stage.”

June 13, 2013: The Ethiopian parliament approved a new Nile Water rights agreement which reduces Egypt’s traditional allotment if Nile River water. Six upstream Nile River basin countries support the agreement. Of course Egypt is not a party to the new agreement. Ethiopia’s parliament was really mocking the Egyptian government’s threats to retaliate against Ethiopia’s new dams. Ethiopian diplomats pointed out that for over ten years Ethiopia has been asking Egypt to participate in Nile River water discussions and Egypt has refused.

June 21, 2013: The head of Egypt's National Water Research Centre claimed that Ethiopia could reduce the flow of the Nile river water to Egypt by ten billion kilo-liters a year. He also claimed that every one billion kilo-liter reduction will take around 200,000 acres of farm land out of production. According to Egyptian figures, Egypt already suffers from a water deficit of around ten billion kilo-liters a year. The research center recently reported that Ethiopia’s dams could lower the river level and make upstream water ferry travel more difficult. Ethiopia rejects these claims as inaccurate and simply more Egyptian propaganda.

June 23, 2013: Ethiopia said that Egypt’s claims of a dooms-day reduction in the flow of the Nile River due to the GERD are absurd allegations. Ethiopia has consistently stated that filling the reservoir behind the Grande Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will take five to six years. Ethiopian government engineers contend that during this process the flow rate of the Nile River not be reduced to any degree that Egyptians will even notice it. The Ethiopian reservoir will hold 74 million cubic meters of water. One of the diplomatic options for resolving the row between Ethiopia and Egypt is for Ethiopia to agree to take 10 or 11 years to fill the reservoir. (Austin Bay)

June 24, 2013: Egypt protest update - Destruction and Death as Rival Protesters Clash'

VOA - Anger and frustration are boiling over in Egypt, where supporters and opponents of President Mohamed Morsi are increasingly clashing in the streets. In Egypt's second largest city, Alexandria, rival protesters turned out in force, fighting with guns and firecrackers. At least one person was killed while the offices of Mr. Morsi's political party were set on fire. Riot police moved in with armored vehicles to break up the clashes,
firing tear gas in an effort to clear the streets. Thousands of Morsi supporters also demonstrated Friday in a show of support for the embattled president, vowing to stay on the streets to protect his legitimacy. Opponents, meanwhile, have been gathering in growing numbers in Cairo's Tahrir Square, waving Egyptian flags and calling for Mr. Morsi's departure.

Bigger opposition protests are planned for Sunday, the one-year anniversary of Mr. Morsi's presidency. Egyptian military officials have urged both sides to refrain from violence and settle their differences through dialogue but neither side appears willing to give in. Saber Atta defended Egypt's president during Friday's pro-Morsi rally in Cairo. "Mohamed Mursi will not fall because he has a people who love him and a group who support him. It is impossible and they (the opposition) are wrong to think that one day Mursi will have the same fate as Hosni Mubarak." Opponents accuse Mr. Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood movement of trying to undermine secular rights and are increasing calling for the current government to fall.

Clashes between the two sides are leaving an ever-growing toll. Two people have reportedly been killed in the recent violence in Alexandria with scores of other wounded. Over the past two days, battles between Morsi supporters and opponents in the provincial regions of Fayyoum, Sharqiya and Dhekeliya have left at least three dead and 300 wounded. Egyptian opposition leader Amr Moussa Friday urged Mr. Morsi to respect the will of the people. "He should take the voice of the people seriously and the protests, the angry comments, as an expression - major expression - of dissatisfaction. Please take that seriously and accept the early elections." Mr. Morsi addressed the nation Wednesday, admitting to making some mistakes but offering few compromises. Moussa called it a miscalculation. "They don't want to recognize that there is anger and those are all people who are being pushed and directed by others. And they are missing the point, they are missing a major point in this." Mr. Morsi took the stage in Cairo's Tahrir Square on June 30 last year as a jubilant crowd celebrated him as the nation's first freely elected leader.

BOSTON HERALD - From the moment we meet, it takes the 30-something Egyptian three minutes, tops, before he expresses his crashing disappointment with his government. "On June 30, you will see another revolution," he predicts, as we approach the Egyptian Museum. "Millions of Egyptians will fill Tahrir Square and other squares around the country. We want the Muslim Brothers out!” As we admire sarcophagi, masks and
mummies in this legendary palace of antiquities, Muhammad barely can contain his frustration with current events. “The Muslim Brothers,” as he and others here call them, “have craved power for 85 years. Now they have it, and they cannot run anything. We were happy to be rid of Mubarak, but right now, we would take him back.” Egyptians rallied for 18 days in early 2011 until their autocratic president stood down. Now 85, Hosni Mubarak is on trial for corruption and complicity in killing protesters during the uprising. Muhammad is in the tourism industry. (Like others in this article, his identity is obscured for his protection.) “I used to work four days a week,” Muhammad laments. “Now, I work four days a month.”

Thanks to President Mohammed Morsi’s economic mismanagement, Egyptians have seen unemployment rise from 8.9 percent, when Mubarak got booted, to 13.2 percent today. Annual growth in the gross domestic product, which was 5 percent in 2010, slowed to 3.3 percent in 2012, according to Trading Economics.com. Foreign-exchange reserves have plunged from $36 billion in December 2010 to $16 billion last month. No surprise, the Egyptian pound, which was 5.5 to the U.S. dollar as Mubarak resigned, now is 7.0. While this exchange rate dazzles visiting Americans, Egyptians wilt beneath this 27 percent loss in buying power. The Muslim Brotherhood’s economic agenda seems to involve printing money: borrowing from Libya, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar: and awaiting a new, $4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund. Egyptians also are coping with energy shortages. These include rolling blackouts and gasoline lines that Deya Abaza describes in Ahram Online as “a recurring feature of Egypt’s post-revolutionary landscape.” “My best year was 2010,” Muhammad says. “I was saving money to buy a house. Now, I have lost one-third of my savings. My dreams have been crushed.”

The self-described Rebel movement declared this day of protest. It says it has secured 15 million signatures calling on Morsi to quit, just one year after he took power, and accept early elections. If accurate, these signatures outstrip the 13.2 million votes (51.7 percent) that Morsi received on June 17, 2012, when he defeated Ahmed Shafiq, Mubarak’s last prime minister, who won 12.3 million votes (48.2 percent). “Message to Mr. Obama: A majority of the Egyptian people doesn’t like the Muslim Brothers,” a shop owner named Omar says from behind his desk. “I am a Muslim. The Muslim Brothers are using religion to advance their politics. What about our Christian brothers and friends?” Omar alludes to the post-Mubarak repression that Egypt’s Copts and other Christians are enduring. “They have the right to live in this country. Christians and Muslims are
woven together here, like this piece of fabric,” he says, tugging at his plaid shirt. “They are Egyptian citizens.”

About 10 minutes away, another shopkeeper defends Morsi and the Muslim Brothers. “Morsi is the legal president,” Hisham states matter-of-factly. “He was elected. If people don’t like him, they should wait three more years and then vote him out.” Muhammad, the young tourism professional, responds. “Imagine you want to take a northbound train from Cairo to Alexandria. You suddenly realize that you are on the wrong train, heading south to Luxor. Do you stay on that train all the way to Luxor or do you get off as soon as you can and start heading in the other direction?” On Sunday, Egyptians will tell the world how much longer they wish to remain aboard the Muslim Brothers’ Express. Deroy Murdock is a syndicated columnist and a media fellow with Stanford University’s Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace.

June 28, 2013: In Egypt (Port Said) a homemade bomb killed one demonstrator and wounded fifteen others. In Alexandria at least three people died in clashes between democrats and Islamic radicals.

June 28, 2013: U.S. diplomats are trying to ease tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt. Egyptian politicians were caught on live microphones discussing ways to stop Ethiopia’s Nile River dam projects. The options discussed included covert military attacks and supporting rebel groups – in other words, the Egyptians were vetting war options. The U.S. has proposed that Ethiopia and Egypt establish a joint working group to examine the impact of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The U.S. has urged Ethiopia to minimize the impact of the dam on downstream nations. The Egyptian leaders were initially embarrassed but they discovered that the Egyptian people rally around the Nile. Despite its own numerous internal troubles, the Egyptian government has continued to threaten Ethiopia should Ethiopia fail to suspend dam construction. Egypt has diplomatic and political power. However, threatening Ethiopia with covert attack invites retaliation by Ethiopia, and at the moment Egypt is far less stable than Ethiopia. Egypt lacks the logistical capacity and long-range strike weapons to conduct a sustained military operation. Conceivably they could use the Nile River as a supply line, but barges on the river would be very susceptible to interdiction by air attack, mines, or other forms of interdiction. (Austin Bay)

June 29, 2013: Israel and the U.S. warned its citizens to not visit Egypt in the next few days because of the growing number of demonstrations there. Supporters of Islamic radical groups are clashing with pro-
democracy groups and it is feared that some of the Islamic radicals may seek out and attack non-Moslems, especially foreigners. Americans and Israelis already in Egypt have been warned to stay away from demonstrations and travel as little as possible. Egypt is suffering from political gridlock and economic collapse as Islamic radicals, democrats, and supporters of the deposed Mubarak dictatorship (and that kind of government) fail to agree on a new government. The Mubarak supporters still occupy many senior positions in the courts and the military and elsewhere in the bureaucracy. The Mubarak supporters control most of the economy as well. Some Islamic radical groups are in armed opposition to the government, especially in the Sinai Peninsula, where they are sheltered by rebellious Bedouin tribesmen. The number of police and soldiers in Gaza keeps increasing, as does the resistance to government authority. Today, for example, a police general was assassinated by a group of gunmen, believed to be Islamic terrorists.

June 30, 2013: In Egypt millions of people continued to demonstrate against the Moslem Brotherhood and what is seen as this Islamic radical group’s attempt to turn Egypt into a religious dictatorship. The headquarters of the Moslem Brotherhood was ransacked by anti-government demonstrators and nationwide there were nearly a thousand casualties over the last few days with at least sixteen dead.

June 30, 2013: Egypt protests set for a showdown, violence feared - Al Jazeera'

Cairo - Egypt braced for mass protests on Sunday as pro- and anti-government protesters gathered in the capital on the first anniversary of the inauguration of country's first democratically elected president. Thousands of people opposed to President Mohamed Morsi have already gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square calling for him to resign, while the president's supporters have vowed to defend his legitimacy to the end, leading to fears of confrontation. Morsi supporters held their own rally outside a Cairo mosque on Friday, an effort to preempt Sunday’s demonstrations, and thousands of them are holding an open-ended sit-in.

The anti-Morsi protests are being organised by a grassroots campaign calling itself Tamarod, meaning "rebellion" or "insubordination", which claims to have collected signatures from 22 million Egyptians demanding the president’s ouster. The signature drive has no legal standing, but it has nonetheless tapped into widespread public anger towards Morsi. The president has made a number of controversial decisions since taking office, most notably a November decree which shielded his decisions from
judicial review. Egypt's economy is in free-fall: The pound has dropped in value by nearly 20 percent since Morsi took office, foreign investment continues to dry up, and businesses are paralysed by widespread fuel and electricity shortages. Human rights abuses remain widespread, rights groups say, with Morsi's administration doing little to rein in the notoriously brutal security services. "We gave him the confidence to give us a new programme, to correct what Mubarak had done to Egypt, but he didn't do that. So we have the right to withdraw the confidence that the Egyptian people gave him," said Eman el-Mahdy, a spokesperson for the Tamarod campaign. "The same Egyptian people have the same right to withdraw this confidence."

Calls to resign

Morsi’s supporters liken the calls for his ouster to a coup, arguing that the only way to remove him is through new elections. They carried signs at Friday’s rally insisting that the president’s "legitimacy is a red line". "If we are saying that we have a majority, and the opposition are saying that they have a majority, how can they decide," asked Nader Omran, a spokesman and adviser to the Freedom and Justice Party - the political wing of Muslim Brotherhood. "What is the other solution for this dilemma, except the ballot box?" Tamarod campaigners have vowed to continue their protests until Morsi resigns, but it remains to be seen whether they can sustain their momentum after Sunday. Even if the protests draw large crowds, the calendar might work in Morsi’s favour: Brutally hot Cairo days are hardly conducive to protests, and the dawn-till-dusk Ramadan fast, which begins around July 8, will discourage public demonstrations. Even if Morsi did step down, which seems unlikely, it remains unclear who could replace him. Campaigners have called for a transitional government that would draft a new constitution and then hold new presidential and parliamentary elections.

Role of the military

The campaign itself has also split over the role of the military, which ruled Egypt for nearly 18 months after Mubarak stepped down. Some organisers have urged the army to step in to provide security, a move interpreted by other activists as a tacit call for a coup against the president. General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the defence minister, said in a statement last week that the army has tried to stay out of politics since Morsi’s election, but warned that it has a duty to "prevent Egypt from slipping into a dark tunnel of civil unrest".
There are widespread fears that Sunday’s protest could end in violence. Clashes have spread across governorates outside the capital in recent days, with four Brotherhood supporters having been killed in various attacks on the group’s offices, and two people killed in fighting in Alexandria on Friday, including a US citizen. Amid the growing unrest, tanks and other military vehicles have started to appear on the streets of Cairo. Still, the period of military rule tarnished the army’s image, and analysts say the generals have little desire to retake power. "They don’t want to be involved," said Hisham Hellyer, a Cairo-based scholar with the Brookings Institution. "If they’re pushed to be involved, it will be because of violence and social disorder, or the threat of it taking place." Source: Al Jazeera

June 30, 2013: Egypt army gives President 48 hours to compromise in crisis'

By Asma Alsharif/Tom Perry: CAIRO (Reuters) - Egypt's powerful armed forces gave Islamist President Mohamed Mursi a virtual ultimatum on Monday to share power, urging the nation's feuding politicians to agree on an inclusive roadmap for the country's future within 48 hours. A dramatic military statement broadcast on state television declared the nation was in danger after millions of Egyptians took to the streets on Sunday to demand that Mursi quit and the headquarters of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood were ransacked. "If the demands of the people are not realized within the defined period, it will be incumbent upon (the armed forces) ... to announce a road map for the future," said the statement by chief-of-staff General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

It was followed by patriotic music.

The people had expressed their will with unprecedented clarity in the mass demonstrations and wasting more time would only increase the danger of division and strife, he said. The army said it would oversee the implementation of the roadmap it sought "with the participation of all factions and national parties, including young people", but it would not get directly involved in politics or government. Anti-Mursi demonstrators outside the presidential palace cheered the army statement, and the main opposition National Salvation Front, which has demanded a national unity government for months, applauded the military’s move.

On Cairo's Tahrir Square, thousands were celebrating the army's move: "We want a new armed forces council to govern until new elections," said accountant Mohamed Ibrahim, 50. "The army alone supports the
legitimate revolutionary will of the people." There was no immediate
reaction from the president's office. It was the second time in just over a
week that the armed forces had issued a formal warning to the politicians,
piling pressure on Mursi to concede power-sharing with the liberal, secular
and left-wing opposition. Analysts said the military intervention could
serve Mursi if he wished to compromise, but it risked giving his opponents
an incentive to harden their demands, sensing support from the street and
the generals, at the risk of triggering a coup. "The ultimatum has the ring
of a potential coup," said Yasser al-Shimy of the International Crisis Group
think-tank. "What makes it not a coup is it gives time for the politicians to
sort out their differences

SELF-DEFENCE?

After the destruction of its offices, the Brotherhood which operated
underground until the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, said it was
considering how best to defend itself. Sunday's mass rallies were bigger
than anything seen since the Arab Spring uprising. Smaller crowds
returned to Tahrir Square and other gathering points on Monday
afternoon. Five non-Brotherhood government ministers tendered their
resignations from the cabinet, apparently in sympathy with the protesters,
underlining a sense of isolation for the party that won a series of elections
last year.

"Both sides are still in their trenches," a senior European diplomat said
just before the military statement. Eight people died in a night of fighting
around the Brotherhood building, where guards fired on youths hurling
rocks and fire bombs. A Brotherhood official said two of its members were
hurt. Another eight people were killed and 731 injured in clashes around
the country on Sunday, the health ministry said. The Brotherhood's official
spokesman told Reuters that the attack had crossed a red line of violence
and among possible responses might be to revive "self-defense
committees" former during the 2011 uprising. "The people will not sit
silent," Gehad El-Haddad said. Mursi's movement complained at the lack
of police protection, which can only heighten its sense of being under
siege from both the liberal opposition and state officialdom inherited from
the old regime.

NOT TALKING

Liberal protest organizers, who declared Mursi ousted by people power on
Sunday, gave him a new deadline of 5 p.m. on Tuesday to quit and call
elections or face a new mass rally. Mursi, who has not appeared in person,
earlier renewed offers via allies of dialogue and pledged to work with a new parliament if disputes over election rules can be ironed out. But he has so far offered no substantial concessions. The opposition does not trust the Islamist movement, which critics accuse of using a series of electoral victories to monopolize power. They want a total reset of the rules of a democracy imperfectly worked out over the past two years. The massive protests showed that the Brotherhood has not only alienated liberals and secularists by seeking to entrench Islamic rule, notably in a new constitution, but has also angered millions of Egyptians with economic mismanagement.

Tourism and investment have dried up, inflation is rampant and fuel supplies are running short, with power cuts lengthening in the summer heat and motorists spending hours fuelling cars. The cost of insuring government debt against default surged to record highs. Forward contracts indicated a significant fall for the pound against the dollar. Protest organizers called on Egyptians to keep occupying central squares across the country in a campaign of peaceful civil disobedience until Mursi goes, setting a Tuesday deadline. Some uniformed policemen marched among protesters in Cairo and Alexandria, chanting "the police and the people are one", and several senior officers addressed the Tahrir Square crowd. Adding to the failure to protect the Brotherhood headquarters, that cast doubt on whether Mursi could rely on the security forces to clear the streets if he gave the order. Opposition leaders, who have seen previous protest waves fizzle after a few days in December and January, were to meet on Monday afternoon to plot their next move. The United States and the European Union have urged Mursi to share power with the opposition, saying only a national consensus can help Egypt overcome a severe economic crisis and build democratic institutions.

July 1, 2013: Egypt: Protesters storm Muslim Brotherhood HQ'

By Hamza Hendawi, CAIRO (AP) — Protesters stormed and ransacked the Cairo headquarters of President Mohammed Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood group early Monday, in an attack that could spark more violence as demonstrators gear up for a second day of mass rallies aimed at forcing the Islamist leader from power. An Associated Press journalist at the scene said protesters managed to breach the compound's defenses and storm the six-story building, and later carted off furniture, files, rugs, blankets, air conditioning units and portraits of Morsi. One protestor emerged with a pistol and handed it over to a policeman outside. Footage on local TV networks showed smashed windows, blackened walls and
smoke billowing out of the fortified villa. A fire was still raging on one floor hours after the building was stormed. One protester tore down the Muslim Brotherhood sign from the building's front wall, while another hoisted Egypt's red, black and white flag out an upper-story window and waved it in the air in triumph.

The Brotherhood's headquarters, located in the eastern district of Cairo of Muqatam, had been the scene of clashes since Sunday evening between armed Morsi supporters barricaded inside the building and young protesters pelting it with firebombs and rocks. Security officials said at least eight protesters were killed in the violence. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media. It was not immediately clear whether the Brotherhood supporters holed up inside who had been battling the protesters late Sunday fled the building overnight. Morsi's critics view the Brotherhood headquarters as the seat of real power in Egypt, consistently claiming that the Islamist group's spiritual leader, Mohammed Badie and his powerful deputy, Khairat el-Shater, were the ones actually calling the shots in the country, not the president.

The Brotherhood has in recent weeks fortified the building's walls in anticipation of the massive opposition protests in which millions took part on Sunday in a display of anger and frustration with the Islamist leader on the anniversary of his inauguration. At least 15 people were killed in clashes Sunday, including the eight in front of the Brotherhood's Cairo headquarters, and hundreds injured. Egypt's state television put the death toll at 16. There was no immediate explanation for the discrepancy. On Monday, anti-Morsi protesters were gearing up for a second day of demonstrations. Some protesters spent the night in dozens of tents pitched in the capital's central Tahrir Square and in front of the president's Ittihadiya Palace. They have vowed to stay there until Morsi resigns. The president's supporters, meanwhile, continued their sit-in in front of a major mosque in another part of Cairo.

The anti-Morsi demonstrators are calling for widespread labor strikes to start Monday in an attempt to ratchet up the pressure on the president, but it was not immediately clear whether unions would respond to the call. Organizers are also calling for sit-ins at the Cabinet building, interim parliament, and another presidential place where Morsi has been working since late last week. Sunday's protests were the largest seen in Egypt in the 2½ years of turmoil since the ouster of autocrat Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. Fears were widespread that the collisions between the two
sides could grow more violent in coming days. Morsi made clear through a 
spokesman that he would not step down and his Islamist supporters 
vowed not to allow protesters to remove one of their own, brought to 
office in a vote deemed free and fair. During the day Sunday, thousands 
of Islamists massed not far from the presidential palace in support of 
Morsi, some of them prepared for a fight with makeshift armor, sticks and 
shields.

The anti-Morsi protesters aimed to show by sheer numbers that the 
country has irrevocably turned against him, a year to the day after he was 
inaugurated as Egypt's first freely elected president. But throughout the 
day and even up to midnight at the main rallying sites, fears of rampant 
violence did not materialize. Instead the mood was largely festive as 
protesters at giant anti-Morsi rallies in Tahrir and outside the Ittihadiya 
palace spilled into side streets and across boulevards, waving flags, 
blowing whistles and chanting. Fireworks went off overhead. Men and 
women, some with small children on their shoulders, beat drums, danced 
and sang, "By hook or by crook, we will bring Morsi down." Residents in 
neighborhoods showered water on marchers below — some carrying tents 
in preparation to camp outside the palace — to cool them in the summer 
heat, and blew whistles and waved flags in support.

"Mubarak took only 18 days although he had behind him the security, 
intelligence and a large sector of Egyptians," said Amr Tawfeeq, an oil 
company employee marching toward Ittihadiya with a Christian friend. 
Morsi "won't take long. We want him out and we are ready to pay the 
price." The massive outpouring against Morsi raises the question of what 
comes next. Protesters have vowed to stay on the streets until he steps 
down. The president, in turn, appears to be hoping protests wane. For 
weeks, Morsi's supporters have depicted the planned protest as a plot by 
Mubarak loyalists. But their claims were undermined by the extent of 
Sunday's rallies. In Cairo and a string of cities in the Nile Delta and on the 
Mediterranean coast, the protests topped even the biggest protests of the 
2011's 18-day uprising, including the day Mubarak quit, Feb. 11, when 
giant crowds marched on Ittihadiya.

It is unclear now whether the opposition, which for months has demanded 
Morsi form a national unity government, would now accept any 
concessions short of his removal. The anticipated deadlock raises the 
question of whether the army, already deployed on the outskirts of cities, 
will intervene. Protesters believe the military would throw its weight 
behind them, tipping the balance against Morsi. The country's police,
meanwhile, were hardly to be seen Sunday. In the lead-up to Sunday, some officers angrily told their commanders they would not protect the Brotherhood from protesters, complaining that police are always caught in the middle, according to video of the meeting released online. "If the Brothers think that we will give up and leave, they are mistaken," said lawyer Hossam Muhareb as he sat with a friend on a sidewalk near the presidential palace. "They will give up and leave after seeing our numbers."

July 1, 2013: The army demanded that the Moslem Brotherhood dominated government resign and allow a new one, not dominated by the Moslem Brotherhood, to be formed. President Morsi was told he had to agree to this within 48 hours or the army would move in and force him to comply. This was greeted with cheers by the many demonstrators still on the streets. Morsi and the Moslem Brotherhood are held responsible for the economic depression since the Arab Spring began two years ago and for generally ignoring the needs of the people. In practice, Morsi attempts to improve the economy were most often stymied by the wealthy (and largely pro-Mubarak) families that do not favor a real democracy, but rather an oligarchy (government controlled by the wealthiest families). Morsi told the army he would not comply with their demand.

For the first time in many years, Egypt has sent tanks to patrol the Gaza border. At least a battalion (30) of tanks are now operating in Sinai, mainly near Gaza.

July 3, 2013: Egypt army deployed amid Cairo tension'

BBC News: The Egyptian military has moved into key sites in Cairo hours after its ultimatum passed for President Mohammed Morsi to resolve a political crisis. Tens of thousands of pro- and anti-Morsi protesters have gathered in areas of the capital, as Egyptians await a televised statement. Before the deadline passed, Mr Morsi repeated his refusal to step down. His aides took to social media to describe the events as a military coup but there was no confirmation of this. There are unconfirmed reports that Egyptian officials have placed an international travel ban on Mr Morsi and other senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Armoured personnel carriers

The army is involved in a show of force, fanning out across Cairo and taking control of the capital, BBC correspondent Quentin Sommerville reports. He described seeing eight armoured personnel carriers heading
for Cairo University in Giza, where one of the main pro-Morsi demonstrations was being held. At least 16 people were killed and about 200 wounded at the university when gunmen opened fire on protesters on Tuesday night. Another pro-Morsi protest was being held in Nasr City, where New York Times reporter Kareem Fahim tweeted that soldiers had fired into the air to disperse demonstrators.

Opponents of the president gathered in Tahrir Square in their tens of thousands. When the army's 48-hour deadline passed, cheers echoed across the square. Whether it is a military coup or not, on the streets of Cairo it certainly looks like one, our correspondent says. Before the army's ultimatum to President Morsi expired at 16:30 (15:30 GMT), he posted a Facebook message calling for a roadmap involving an interim coalition government.

His whereabouts were not immediately clear but BBC Arabic confirmed that he was at the Cairo headquarters of the Republican Guard, a military site where he has stayed since the start of the protests. One of Mr Morsi's aides, Issam al-Haddad, wrote on his Facebook page that he was "fully aware" his words might be the "last lines I get to post on this page", adding that what was happening was a "military coup".

Defiant speech

The army had earlier held meetings with political and religious leaders to discuss the crisis. But the ruling Freedom and Justice party - the political arm of Mr Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood - stayed away from the talks. Mr Morsi's opponents have accused him and the Muslim Brotherhood of pushing an Islamist agenda onto Egypt, and that he should stand down. In a defiant televised speech on Tuesday evening, Mr Morsi said he would give his life to defend constitutional legitimacy, and blamed the unrest on corruption and remnants of the ousted regime of Hosni Mubarak.

Army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was reported to have met his top commanders on Wednesday - and a source close to the military told AFP news agency they had been discussing details of a post-Morsi roadmap. The army's plan reportedly includes an outline for new presidential elections, the suspension of the new constitution and the dissolution of parliament. Members of the Tamarod (Rebel) movement, which has mobilised millions of demonstrators onto the streets to demand Mr Morsi's resignation, were also part of the meeting. So too were leading religious figures and opposition leader Mohammed ElBaradei. An opposition source told Reuters Mr ElBaradei would "urge the armed forces to intervene to
stop the bloodshed". Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Gehad el-Haddad said the army had no right to offer such a plan.

"A roadmap is something that the constitution outlines and the president directs. It's not the role of the military." He said the Brotherhood was open to any solution, but that it had to be through "representatives of the people", and proposed speeding through parliamentary elections. "If the protests on the street prove anything they prove the people of Egypt are ready to have their say. They can sweep the parliamentary election, impeach the president, change the constitution and set the roadmap that they want, but it has to be the right of the people." Military sources earlier told the BBC that under the draft plan, the president could be replaced by a council of cross-party civilians and technocrats ahead of new elections. The president was put under further pressure by the resignation of six ministers from his government on Monday, including Foreign Minister Kamel Amr.

Elected president: Mr Morsi became Egypt's first Islamist president on 30 June 2012, after winning an election considered free and fair following the 2011 revolution that toppled Mubarak. But dissent has been growing, with protesters angry at the lack of change in post-revolution Egypt and accusing the Brotherhood of trying to protect its own interests. "This is a president threatening his own people. We don't consider him the president of Egypt," said Mohammed Abdelaziz, a leader of Tamarod. However, Mr Morsi and the Brotherhood still have significant public support, and both sides have drawn huge numbers to rallies in recent days. At least 39 people have now died since the protests began on Sunday. The instability has also hit global oil prices, sending US light crude above $100 a barrel for the first time since September last year, amid concerns supply routes through the Suez Canal could be affected.

Egyptian army places President Mohammed Morsi under house arrest'

AP – July 4, 2013: Egypt's toppled leader Mohammed Morsi was detained by authorities along with some of his key supporters hours after his ouster by the powerful military, even as the defiant president insisted that he remains the country's legitimate leader. According to two senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood, 61-year-old Morsi is being held at a military facility with top aides, media reports said today. Earlier security forces had imposed a travel ban on Morsi and other leading figures in the Muslim Brotherhood. The Egyptian police said it has orders to arrest 300 leaders and members of Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood. The head of Egypt's armed forces yesterday ousted Morsi just one year after he was elected as the
country's first democratically elected president in 2012 after nearly three-decades authoritarian rule of strongman Hosni Mubarak.

Egyptian army commander General Abdel Fattah Sisi on state television issued a declaration suspending the Constitution and appointing the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour, as interim head of state. Mansour would be sworn in today, Al-Ahram online reported. Sisi called for presidential and parliamentary elections, a panel to review the constitution and a national reconciliation committee. He said the roadmap had been agreed by a range of political groups. The move came after Islamist leader refused to quit following the end of a 48-hour deadline set by the army to resolve the political crisis that arose after millions of Egyptian demanding his resignation took to the streets.

Egypt's iconic Tahrir Square, the hub of the anti-Morsi protesters -- erupted into into ecstasy as the military announced his outer. However, a statement on Morsi’s Facebook page denounced the army move as a "military coup". "The procedures announced by the general command of the armed forces represents a full coup d'etat that is completely unacceptable," the statement said. In spite of the military's announcement, Morsi's statement stressed that he remains the head of state and the supreme commander of the armed forces. Morsi's statement asked Egyptian citizens - both civilians and military - to "abide by the constitution and the law and not to respond to this coup".

The official website of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ikhwan Online, said that the military’s announcement is a "conspiracy against legitimacy, a military coup that wastes popular will and brings Egypt back to despotism." Meanwhile, Islamist supporters of Morsi gathered in a Cairo suburb and reacted angrily to the announcement by the army. Some broke up paving stones, forming piles of rocks. Muslim Brotherhood security guards in hard hats and holding sticks formed a cordon around the encampment, close to a mosque. Men and women wept and chanted. Denouncing military chief Sisi, some shouted: "Sisi is void! Islam is coming! We will not leave!" At least 10 people were killed when opponents and supporters of Morsi clashed after the army announced of his removal, state media and officials said.

Eight of those reported dead were in the northern city of Marsa Matrouh. Al-Anani Hamouda, a senior provincial security official, said two members of security forces were among those killed in the clashes. "We are dealing with the situation. ... We have called for security reinforcements in the area," said senior police officer Sherif Abdelhamid. Dozens more were
wounded in Fayoum, south of Cairo, where unidentified assailants broke into the local offices of the Freedom and Justice Party, the Brotherhood's political wing, MENA news agency said. The attackers looted the headquarters and set them on fire, it said. Egyptian Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim ordered the shut down three main pro-Morsi channels.

The minister had taken the decision to close all "religious channels," namely the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Misr 25, the Salfi oriented Al-Nas and Al-Hafez channels. Expressing concern over the situation in Egypt, US President Barack Obama asked the country's military to hand over powers to a democratically elected government as soon as possible. "We are deeply concerned by the decision of the Egyptian Armed Forces to remove President Morsi and suspend the Egyptian constitution," Obama said. "I now call on the Egyptian military to move quickly and responsibly to return full authority back to a democratically elected civilian government as soon as possible through an inclusive and transparent process, and to avoid any arbitrary arrests of President Morsi and his supporters," he said. The grand sheikh of Al-Azhar mosque said that he supported the call for early presidential elections based on an Islamic precept that the better of two evils is a religious duty. Speaking shortly after military's announcement, liberal opposition leader Mohamed ElBaradei said the "2011 revolution was re-launched" and that the roadmap meets the demand of the protesters. Egypt's leading Muslim and Christian clerics also backed the army-sponsored roadmap. Morsi came under massive pressure in the run-up to Sunday's anniversary of his maiden year in office, with his opponents accusing him of failing the 2011 revolution by concentrating power in Islamist hands.

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African Union suspends Egypt For Overthrowing Elected President’

The African Union (AU) on Friday, July 5, 2013 suspended Egypt from all its activities after the Egyptian military overthrew the elected president, Mohamed Mursi, a senior AU official said. Suspension is the AU’s usual response to any interruption of constitutional rule by a member state. “As mandated by the relevant AU instruments, the African Union Peace and Security Council decides to suspend the participation of Egypt in AU activities until the restoration of constitutional order,” Admore Kambudzi, Secretary of the Peace and Security Council, said after a meeting.

Egypt's lesson for political Islam: politics comes first'

PARIS (Reuters) July 8, 2013: By Tom Heneghan, Religion Editor

When the Muslim Brotherhood won power it seemed Egypt's nascent democracy would allow the movement to realize its dream of making Islam the guiding principle in politics. The Arab Spring revolts had opened
the door to full Islamist participation in politics after decades of oppression or exile. A year later, Egypt's first Islamist president, Mohamed Mursi, has been forced out, illustrating the Islamists' dilemma as they champion faith while newly empowered citizens look more for effective pluralist governance. "Islamism has always been more of a sentiment than a coherent political ideology," said Husain Haqqani, a former Pakistani ambassador to the United States. "Islamism is by definition not inclusive, but they need to be inclusive now." The main political divide elected Islamists face is often not over religion, French Islam expert Olivier Roy said. "Look at all the veiled women who were protesting against Mursi. They're not against sharia. They're against incompetence and nepotism," he said.

BORN IN EGYPT

Political Islam arose in Egypt in 1928 when Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood, a revival movement to establish an Islamic state. "Islam is the solution" was its motto. Banned for decades and opposed by Islamic authorities, it organized networks around the country, especially to provide social welfare services that won it grass-roots respect. When the 2011 Tahrir Square revolt toppled former President Hosni Mubarak, the Brotherhood emerged as the country's only organized force besides the army.

But the Islamists were not equipped to tackle the daunting economic problems or tame a hostile bureaucracy. While public anger mounted over these issues, Mursi assumed special powers to help impose an Islamist-tinged constitution. John Esposito, professor of religion and international affairs at Georgetown University in Washington, said the Brotherhood's reaction to criticism betrayed the defensive reflexes of its underground past. "Good governance requires taking risks and reaching out to people you can't control, but they couldn't do that," he said. In late June, Mursi protested he had reached out to his critics but they would not work with him. "I took responsibility for a country mired in corruption and was faced with a war to make me fail," he said.

RIPPLES IN TUNISIA

In Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring, the Islamist-led government is also under pressure as politicians battle over a new constitution, hardline Salafis attack secularists and unemployment and inflation rise. The governing party Ennahda, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, also built its grass-roots network under the previous dictatorship, winning 42
percent in the 2011 election. In contrast to Islamists often jailed during Egypt's dictatorship, party founder Rachid Ghannouchi spent 22 years in exile in Britain where he said he saw how religions could operate in a pluralist political system.

Ennahda formed a government with two secular parties and has not insisted on any mention of sharia in the constitution. But its weak response to attacks by Salafi extremists on cinemas, concerts and Sufi shrines made critics suspect that it secretly sympathized with them. The party denied the charge. The assassination of secular opposition leader Chokri Belaid in February sparked a crisis and the government collapsed. Ennahda formed a second government with the same junior partners but a new prime minister and named independents to head the key ministries of interior, defense, justice and foreign affairs. It also cracked down hard on Salafi radicals. This has not gone far enough for a small group of Tunisian activists that launched a petition like the one that led to Egypt's mass protests. It wants a new caretaker government that would curb the Islamists and fix the faltering economy. "The possibility of an Egyptian scenario is unlikely in Tunisia," Ali Lareyedh, the new prime minister, responded. "Our approach is characterized by consensus and partnership."

THE TARNISHED TURKISH MODEL

In the first flush of the Arab Spring, many Arab Islamists looked to Turkey's AKP as a model that has respected faith and still won three national elections in a row. But the AKP had more political savvy and a more developed economy to work with. It gave up the goal of an Islamic state over a decade ago and focused on rapid economic growth. The AKP has not renounced the official secularism imposed by Turkey's former military rulers. The Muslim Brotherhood rapped Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan for defending the secular state during an otherwise triumphant visit to Egypt in 2011. Erdogan and his allies started in local politics, learning skills that would pay off at the polls. "Neither the Muslim Brotherhood nor Ennahda had this kind of experience," Roy said. Still, the AKP has angered secularists by fostering a more visible Islam, helping build mosques and limiting alcohol sales. Street protests broke out this year at Istanbul's Taksim Square and elsewhere over issues ranging from the environment to city planning and an Islamic-inspired morality campaign. The protesters' main complaint was what they saw as Erdogan's growing authoritarianism after a decade in power with no effective opposition to rein him in. "That's not an Islamic issue," said Istanbul columnist Mustafa Akyol. Stung but not subdued, Erdogan has
dismissed the protesters as "riff-raff" and indulged in some Muslim populism to attack them at a rally in Kayseri in Anatolia's pious heartland. "They think their vote is not equal to the votes of Ahmet or Mehmet or the shepherd in Kayseri. They have enjoyed their whiskies on the banks of the Bosphorus," he said.

FALL OF POLITICAL ISLAM?

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, fighting an insurgency including the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, has called Mursi's failure "the fall of what is called political Islam." It is a setback but not likely the end of Islamists' decade-long efforts to link the power of religion to politics. Roy said the Egyptian Brotherhood and Ennahda might both split into two groups, one keeping their groups' traditional approach and the other attracting more modern activists. The coup could also push frustrated Islamists to violence. "The message will resonate throughout the Muslim World loud and clear: democracy is not for Muslims," Mursi's National Security Adviser Essam El-Haddad wrote in a farewell Facebook post. "There will be a greater feeling that Islam is targeted and this could lead to future mergers between some factions within the Brotherhood and Salafi groups that see eye to eye," said Jordanian analyst Mohammad Abu Rumman in Amman.

Egypt President Morsi's removal is not said to be a military coup d'etat’ (Ahram Analysis) - It is a popular uprising led by young Egyptians' It is wrong to describe the removal of President Mosri as a military coup. The military was just one of a amalgamation of forces who are angry with Morsi and left excluded by him and his ruling party. The leading force behind the removal of Morsi is a group of young Egyptians who believed that Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood stole their revolution. They planed and organized the largest petition drive in history, gathering 23 million signatures, demanding Morsi to resign. Read the following article to get a better understanding of what led to the ouster of Morsi. Speaking to Reuters, Tamarod leaders detail how they mobilised masses to demand the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi, who was eventually toppled by the Egyptian army.

The 28-year-old activist in sneakers, jeans and a worn-out polo shirt invented the magic formula that drew millions of Egyptians out to demand the overthrow of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi. Now he is determined to ensure all their demands are met. On the day the army stepped in to remove Morsi last week, Badr and his two twenty-something co-founders
of the "Tamarud - Rebel!" movement got a phone call from a general staff colonel, inviting them to meet the armed forces commander-in-chief. Speaking to Reuters in a bare suburban high-rise apartment lent to his protest movement by an obscure political party, Badr said it was their first contact of any sort with the military. They had to borrow a car to drive - unwashed and unshaven - to military intelligence headquarters, where they were ushered into a room with generals, a grand sheikh, the Coptic pope, a senior judge and political opposition leaders. Far from being overawed, Badr was soon arguing with General Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi about the military's roadmap for a political transition, and rejecting his suggestion that Morsi should call a referendum on his continued rule. Millions of people were demonstrating for the recall of the president, not for a referendum, the activist told Sisi. "I tell you, sir, you may be the general commander of the Egyptian army but the Egyptian people are your supreme commander, and they are immediately ordering you to side with their will and call an early presidential election," he said.

The general surrendered. A bunch of kids in T-shirts had changed the course of the Arab world's most populous nation by mobilising mass protests against the ruling Muslim Brotherhood, then threatening to turn on anyone who resists their demands. "We own the streets because we stand with the people and the will of the people, and we will always do so," Badr said. Like many activists of the Facebook generation, he cut his political teeth in the uprising that toppled veteran autocrat Hosni Mubarak in 2011. He started working as a journalist and voted for Morsi a year ago but became disillusioned. He told the generals that if they opted for a half-way solution, they would be lost. If they stuck to the referendum idea, he and his movement would walk out. "I don't have a blank cheque from the people," he told Sisi. "People signed Tamarud's petition for an early presidential election so I can't go out and tell them anything else. "If you are worried about the Brotherhood's reaction, they will also refuse a referendum, so in that case you will lose both sides. Win the Egyptian people!" A senior military source confirmed that Sisi dropped the idea of a referendum in deference to Tamarud's argument.

Winners never quit

Badr, who is not shy of saying he has presidential ambitions in the long term, was elated by his sudden power. "The idea that you are drawing the political map of your country that we believe is the most important nation in the Arab world is so great," he said. A sign pinned on the wall proclaims: "Winners never quit, and quitters never win." It seems hard to
believe that two young journalists and a student, armed only with laptops and mobile phones, succeeded in two months in launching a mass movement where Egypt's divided opposition parties had struggled to gain any traction. Badr put it down to sheer hard work that he, Mohamed Abdelaziz, 28, and Hassan Shahin, 23, had put in. "No one did what we did," he said. "Most groups held conferences or at most a protest in downtown Cairo, but we toured the country and went without sleep for days so we will not give up, and we will continue inshallah (God willing)."

Tamarud activists scoured towns and villages collecting signatures on a red-printed petition demanding the recall of Morsi. They say they got 22 million signatures with names, signatures and national identity numbers, nine million more than the electors who voted to elect the president. No one has checked the numbers, but they invited the United Nations to send observers to verify the petitions.

Quitters never win

As the movement grew and called for mass demonstration on June 30, the first anniversary of Morsi's inauguration, new, less familiar recruits permeated its branches. One Tamarud activist who spoke to Reuters said she resigned three days before the giant protest because she was concerned that the secret police and former Mubarak supporters were infiltrating the movement. "Suddenly, the faces had changed," said B.A., who asked not to give her full name for fear of retribution from the security services. "Many of the people I'd worked with left, and some of the new faces I knew were felul (remnants), nostalgic for Mubarak, or justifying the work of state security." The Amn Dowla state security agency, which detained and tortured dissidents under Mubarak, especially Islamists, is widely hated and feared. Formally dissolved after the 2011 uprising, it was renamed and remains mostly intact. Muslim Brotherhood leaders have alleged that former Mubarak cronies and secret policemen funded and encouraged Tamarud. Ahmed Shafiq, Mubarak's last prime minister and a former air force general now living in Abu Dhabi and accused publicly by Morsi of pulling strings behind sabotage in Egypt, says he was in close touch with the protesters. He predicted on July 1 that Morsi's reign would end within a week and said he was "in continuous coordination with colleagues in Cairo".

Whistles and red card

Badr shrugged off any suggestion that he, or his movement, could have been manipulated by Shafiq or covert forces. Other groups might have
jumped on the bandwagon, but Tamarud remained in the driver's seat, he said.

Activists noted that while the Brotherhood provided transportation, food and drink for their supporters, sitting in outside a suburban Cairo mosque, the Tahrir Square crowds were given only whistles and red cards to "send Morsi off".

Badr resisted any suggestion that Tamarud should call on its followers to leave the streets and go home, saying their mobilisation was keeping vengeful Brotherhood supporters at bay.

"As long as they (Brotherhood supporters) see lots of people on the other side of the street, they will stay in their place," he said.

The Tamarud leaders have worked closely with senior liberal politician Mohamed El-Baradei and were elated when, during the interview, the interim president's office called them to say the former U.N. nuclear agency chief would be named prime minister.

They jumped out of their chairs, slapped high-fives and broke into a chant of "The army and the people, one hand!"

"El-Baradei is our Bob (daddy), the leader of the revolution," Badr said. "He won the Nobel and we will take it as well."

Their joy proved premature. ElBaradei's appointment was held up by resistance from conservative Islamists who make awkward bedfellows with the young revolutionaries.

But they are too high on exhaustion to be discouraged.

"Hope is always there. It can come and go, but it is always there," Badr said, citing an Arabic poem. He added in his own words: "By our willpower, we will turn hope into action. This revolution will succeed, this generation will not be defeated."

How can Egypt get out of crisis?

By Gerald Butt BBC Middle East Analyst (July 29, 2013): Egyptians are discovering in a more public and painful way than other Arab Spring states that removing long-standing authoritarian rule is a lot easier than replacing it with another system of governance. The priority of the popular uprisings was to topple dictatorships, and little thought was given to what might come next. The general assumption was that freeing Arab countries
from autocracy would automatically herald democracy. But this is where the Arab Spring has come unstuck. For a prerequisite of democracy is politics. In order for politics to flourish one needs open debate. Yet open debate is not easy to achieve in a country like Egypt where there is no tradition, from school onwards, of the frank analysis of ideas, and the free and peaceful exchange of opinions. In the absence of all the above, Egypt is floundering as it seeks to create a post-Mubarak political system. The most dangerous symptom of this is polarisation and the absence of willingness to compromise for the sake of the country as a whole.

The political process since the fall of ousted former leader Hosni Mubarak has served only to emphasise the schism in Egyptian society. The Muslim Brotherhood won elections, but then failed to persuade millions of Egyptians that their policies were inclusive. The army responded to popular dissatisfaction with President Mohammed Morsi by toppling the Muslim Brotherhood administration and thereby alienating something between a third and half the population. That, surely, should have been the moment for calm attempts at political reconciliation. But, with Mr Morsi under lock and key and with clashes between rival groups on the streets, the military made what was arguably the most damaging decision of all: it urged anti-Morsi protesters to stage a mass rally to give the army a popular mandate to take tough measures against its opponents. In a stroke, this announcement cut the legs off the ailing figure of Egyptian democracy - for it sanctified the street as the main platform for politics, with force of numbers, rocks, tear gas and bullets taking the place of rational debate.

Bruising confrontation

The formidable challenge for Egypt today is to rescue politics from the street as the first step towards national reconciliation. The problem is finding the means to achieve this. The Brotherhood, for its part, insists that protests will continue until the military-backed government steps down and the democratically elected one is returned to power. The killings of dozens of Islamists in clashes with the army have only hardened attitudes. Up until the ousting of Mr Morsi on 3 July, the army was regarded as the sole political arbiter in Egypt. With the military now siding with the anti-Morsi camp, it has lost that role. No other Egyptian institution or individual appears to be able to take it on. Arab mediation is unlikely, given the schism in the region over the army's move, with a number of states delighted to see the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam humiliated. Diplomatic intervention from outside the region is likely
to be viewed by both entrenched sides as unwarranted interference. So in the short term, there seems little hope for anything other than bruising street confrontations between Morsi supporters on one side, and the military (and anti-Morsi crowds) on the other. Full-scale civil war in the traditional sense will be avoided simply because the Islamists lack the firepower and armaments for a full confrontation with the army. Also, unlike Syria, regional powers have no vested interests in stoking the conflict.

Hope? Nevertheless, continuing violence will mean yet more chaos, leading to increased disruption to the economy and daily life. Herein, perhaps, lies a glimmer of hope. Soaring unemployment and poverty might in the end force Egyptians to put aside their differences and demand that their leaders do the same to save the whole country from social and economic collapse. At that point, Egypt will still need men and women courageous enough to encourage free and inclusive debate, thus laying the foundations of politics and democracy that the country and all Arab Spring countries desperately need.

August 9, 2013: In the Sinai an Egyptian helicopter fired missiles at a meeting of Islamic terrorists, killing twelve people. Egypt has sent thousands of additional security personnel into Sinai, but many of the local Bedouin tribesmen and the Islamic terrorists living among them are resisting any more government control and proving very difficult to shut down.

August 10, 2013: Egypt: Al Azhar Preacher Urges Citizens to Give Interests of Homeland Top Priority' Egypt State Information Service (Cairo) - Al Azhar preacher affirmed the necessity of putting the higher interests of the homeland above all other considerations and achieving unity among all Egyptians. In his Friday sermon, Al Azhar preacher warned of the disputes that may lead to destruction and corruption and undermine the march of the Islamic nation. He urged the necessity of adhering to the good manners that Muslims kept during Ramadan, in order to unify their ranks.

August 10, 2013: In the Sinai an Egyptian helicopter fired missiles at a meeting of Islamic terrorists, killing twelve people. Egypt has sent thousands of additional security personnel into Sinai, but many of the local Bedouin tribesmen and the Islamic terrorists living among them are resisting any more government control and proving very difficult to shut down.

August 12, 2013: Egypt police expected to besiege Morsi sit-ins’
By Aya Batrawy (AP) The development sets the stage for a possible confrontation between the military-backed government and the thousands gathered at the protest sites in support of ex-President Mohammed Morsi. The protesters have said they will not leave until Morsi, ousted in a popularly supported coup on July 3, is reinstated. Weeks of efforts by the international community to end the standoff and find a peaceful resolution have so far failed. Egypt's interim prime minister warned just ahead of the Muslim Eid al-Fitr holiday that ended Sunday that the government's decision to clear the sit-ins was "irreversible." Egypt's new leadership says the protests have frightened residents of Cairo, sparked deadly violence and disrupted traffic. Leaders of the sit-in say they have been peaceful and blame security forces and "thugs" for violence. More than 250 people have killed in violence since Morsi's ouster. At the main Cairo sit-in, vendors said they have sold hundreds of gas masks, goggles and gloves to protesters readying for police tear gas. Three waist-high barriers of concrete and wood have been built against armored vehicles. The security officials said they would set up cordons around the protest sites to bar anyone from entering, and one of the officials said that could begin as soon as sunrise. But by dawn Monday, there was no indication of any troops moving and the government has not confirmed when forces would advance on the sit-ins. The Interior Ministry has said it would take gradual measures, issuing warnings in recent weeks and saying it would use water cannons and tear gas to minimize casualties. Interior Ministry officials, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to discuss details of the security plans, said they are prepared for clashes that might be set off by the cordons.

The officials said police are working with the Health Ministry to ensure ambulances are on hand for the wounded and that armored police vans are nearby to take away those arrested. A special force within the riot police trained for crowd dispersal is expected to deal with protesters. In the past, however, Egypt's riot police, many lacking the training to deal with unarmed civilians, have resorted to using lethal force. Mass rallies two weeks ago called by Egypt's military leader, Gen. Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, showed that a large segment of Egypt's population backs the armed forces' actions against Morsi's supporters. Just before the holiday, the government said international efforts failed to reach a diplomatic solution to the standoff with Morsi's supporters, who include members of his Muslim Brotherhood. A last-ditch effort was launched over the weekend by the Sunni Muslim world's pre-eminent religious institution, Al-Azhar, to push for a resolution. There are fears that violence from police trying to clear the two sites will spread to other areas of the capital and beyond,
where thousands of Morsi supporters also hold near-daily marches. The main protest camp in Cairo is between middle-class residential buildings and ground floor businesses. Its focal point is a mosque and an adjacent stage where Brotherhood leaders charged with inciting violence openly talk to journalists. Among them is former lawmaker Mohammed el-Beltagy, who vowed over the weekend to continue protesting at the sit-ins. "We will happily sacrifice our souls, not for ourselves but to free the captured nation and to ensure freedom and dignity to our people and to the coming generations," he said.

Security officials, speaking anonymously because they are not authorized to release the information, suspect Brotherhood guards around the mosque in Rabaah al-Adawiya Square are well-armed. They also say both camps have armed protesters on rooftops ready to shoot. The Interior Ministry has depicted the encampments as a public danger, saying 11 bodies bearing signs of torture were found near both sites. Amnesty International has also reported that anti-Morsi protesters have been captured, beaten, subjected to electric shocks or stabbed. At least eight bodies have arrived at a morgue in Cairo bearing signs of torture, the human rights group said. Of the more than 250 people killed since Morsi's ouster, at least 130 were his supporters who died in two clashes with security forces last month. At the Cairo sit-ins, the overwhelming majority echo the demands of the Muslim Brotherhood: Restore Morsi to power and reverse all the actions taken by the military, including suspension of the disputed constitution and disbanding of the legislature. Many of those interviewed dismissed the mass protests against Morsi in the final weekend of June that preceded the military coup. They acknowledge that Egypt is sharply divided, but worry that if they do not defend the sit-ins, they will be detained and tortured — just as many were before the 2011 uprising that toppled autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

They say they waited for hours to vote for Morsi in the elections that catapulted his Brotherhood to power after years of oppression and that the military leaders have now stolen their children's future by overturning the outcomes of the balloting. Um Roqiya said she will remain camped out with her five children, despite concerns for their safety. "We are here to defend legitimacy. If I die defending that, we are martyrs," she said while patting her 7-year-old son on the head. Her husband, longtime Brotherhood member Abdel-Latif Omran, said he can do nothing to protect his children from death because their fate has already been decided by God. Organizations like UNICEF have condemned what it calls the deliberate use of children in Egypt who are "put at risk as potential
witnesses to or victims of violence." The Brotherhood says it cannot control families that choose to camp out. Neither authorities nor the guards have made clear how women and children will be able to safely leave if rocks start flying and tear gas is fired. In past clashes, birdshot and live bullets were allegedly used by both sides. Saber Mohammed Mansour, who is from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, has spent 44 days as a guard at the main camp. Dressed in a traditional "galabiya," a long loose garment, Mansour said he is willing to die for the cause.

August 13, 2013: Massacre in Egypt'

Dozens Dead as Egyptian Forces Commit 3rd Mass Killing of Pro-Morsi Demonstrators' 'Democracy Now' a daily independent global news hour with Amy Goodman & Juan González:

Security forces have committed a new mass killing of Muslim Brotherhood demonstrators supporting the ousted president, Mohamed Morsi. Dozens of people have been reportedly killed in raids on two pro-Morsi encampments in Cairo. Alastair Beach, Cairo correspondent for The Independent, has been visiting morgues near Rabaa al-Adawiya Square where scores of bodies are reportedly being held. Speaking to us from a hospital where the injured are being treated, Beach says he has personally counted about 83 or 84 bodies today, most of them with gunshot wounds to the head, indicating they have been shot by police snipers.

Transcript

This is a rush transcript. Copy may not be in its final form.

AMY GOODMAN: We go to breaking news in Egypt, where forces have committed a new mass killing of Muslim Brotherhood demonstrators supporting the ousted president, Mohamed Morsi. Dozens of people have been reportedly killed in raids on two pro-Morsi encampments in Cairo. We turn now to Alastair Beach, Cairo correspondent for The Independent. He’s been visiting morgues in Rabaa, where scores of bodies are reportedly being held. He says he has personally counted about 83 or 84 bodies today, most of them with gunshot wounds to the head, indicating they’ve been shot by police snipers. He spoke to us from a hospital where the injured were being treated. Listen carefully.

ALASTAIR BEACH: I’m in the center of the injured people surrounding on the floor all around me. There’s five or six floors of the hospital, and they’re just telling them to move, such is the level of injuries and dying
who have been there, who have been admitted. There’s people being treated on the stairs. Every other minute, it seems, another body is being forced through the front door. All the while there’s just [inaudible] gunfire, automatic, ringing out throughout the encampment. There’s two makeshift—at least two makeshift morgues which have been established. I was in one of them in a field hospital a couple of hours ago. There were 42 bodies there at the time. I wouldn’t be surprised if that number has risen. There’s a second one I went to close by in which at least 31 bodies were being kept. [inaudible] and it’s so chaotic that the injured are being treated in the same room as the dead bodies are being kept.

I’ve also been to the—at a mosque which lies at the center of the sit-in. At the moment it’s crammed full with hundreds of women and children. At the center of the mosque, on the carpet, there were 10 bodies lying on the floor with a cordon surrounding them. All the while, of course, there’s sustained bursts of gunfire ringing out around this pit and outside. It’s an extremely precarious situation. The doctors I’ve spoken to have spoken of hundreds of people who have been hit. There’s no [inaudible], and there wasn’t enough time. This is an ongoing situation. But it is an extremely, extremely dangerous situation unfolding in Cairo right now. AMY GOODMAN: Alastair Beach, Cairo correspondent for The Independent, reporting from a hospital in Cairo, saying there are likely hundreds of people dead as gunshots continue to ring out in Cairo.

August 14, 2013: In Egypt police moved in on two groups of Islamic radical demonstrators who had established long-term (six weeks so far) occupations of areas in the capital. The occupations were part of an effort to get recently deposed president Morsi reinstated. The protestors refused to move and force was used. Nearly 300 people died, over 80 percent of them civilians. In response small groups of Islamic radicals attacked government buildings, media centers, hospitals, and so on. By the end of the day the government had declared 30 days of martial law (a state of emergency). The Islamic radicals have tried to avoid violence because the last time they went that way in the 1990s, the extremists among them began killing civilians indiscriminately and that turned the population against them. Egyptians have not forgotten this and again feel that the Islamic radicals (in the form of the Moslem Brotherhood) are becoming a cure worse than the disease.

August 14, 2013: Egyptian troops move against pro-Morsi sit-ins’

CAIRO (AP): By Hamza Hendawi and Maggie Michael— Egyptian security forces, backed by armored cars and bulldozers, moved on Wednesday to
clear two sit-in camps by supporters of the country's ousted President Mohammed Morsi, showering protesters with tear gas as the sound of gunfire rang out at both sites, state television and security officials said. At least two members of the security forces were confirmed to have died in the morning's crackdown while a group representing the protesters said as many as 25 protesters were killed in one of the camps. The smaller of the two camps was cleared of protesters by late morning, with most of them taking refuge in the nearby Orman botanical gardens and inside the sprawling campus of Cairo University. However, security forces remained on the fringes of the other camp in the eastern Nasr City district after it showered the encampment with tear gas. Television footage from there showed thousands of protesters congregating at the heart of the site, with many wearing gas masks or covering their faces to fend off the tear gas. A security official said a total of 200 protesters have been arrested from both sites. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

The Anti-Coup Alliance, an umbrella of pro-Morsi supporters, said in a statement that 25 were killed and dozens injured in the attack on the Nasr City camp, claiming that security forces used live ammunition. The Interior Ministry, which is in charge of the police, said it only used tear gas and that its forces came under fire from the camp. Two policemen were killed and five were injured by gunfire, it said. A ministry statement also warned that forces would deal firmly with protesters acting "irresponsibly," suggesting that it would respond in kind if its men are fired upon. It said it would guarantee safe passage to those who want to leave the Nasr City site but would arrest those wanted for questioning by prosecutors. An Associated Press television video journalist at the scene in Nasr City said he could hear the screams of women as a cloud of white smoke hung over the protest encampment. He said a bulldozer was removing mounds of sand bags and brick walls built earlier by the protesters as a defense line in their camp. Army troops did not take part in the two operations, but provided security in the areas. Police and army helicopters hovered over both sites as plumes of smoke rose over the city skyline. The simultaneous actions by the Egyptian forces began shortly after 7 a.m. (0500 GMT). Regional television networks were showing images of collapsed tents and burning tires at both sites, with ambulances on standby. They were also showing protesters being arrested and led away by black-clad policemen.

At one point, state television showed footage of some dozen protesters, mostly bearded, cuffed and sitting on a sidewalk under guard outside the
Cairo University campus. At least 250 people have died in clashes in Egypt following Morsi's ouster in a military coup that followed days of mass protests by millions of Egyptians calling for his removal. Supporters of the Islamist president want him reinstated. "The world cannot sit back and watch while innocent men, women and children are being indiscriminately slaughtered. The world must stand up to the military junta's crime before it is too late," said a statement by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist group from which Morsi hails. We go to breaking news in Egypt, where security forces have committed a new mass killing of Muslim Brotherhood demonstrators supporting the ousted president, Mohamed Morsi. Dozens of people have been reportedly killed in raids on two pro-Morsi encampments in Cairo. Alastair Beach, Cairo correspondent for The Independent, has been visiting morgues near Rabaa al-Adawiya Square where scores of bodies are reportedly being held. Speaking to us from a hospital where the injured are being treated, Beach says he has personally counted about 83 or 84 bodies today, most of them with gunshot wounds to the head, indicating they have been shot by police snipers.

August 15, 2013: Death toll from Egypt violence rises to 638, according to MoH'

CAIRO (AP) — The Egyptian Ministry of Health has raised the death toll from the day's violence that followed a crackdown on two camps housing supporters of the ousted president to 638. Ministry spokesman Mohammed Fathallah told The Associated Press on Thursday that the number of injured in the previous day's violence also has risen to 3,994. Wednesday's violence began when police moved to clear two protest camps housing mainly Islamist protesters calling for Mohammed Morsi's reinstatement. The crackdown prompted clashes elsewhere in Cairo and other cities. Fathallah said 288 of the dead were killed in the larger of the two camps, in Cairo's eastern Nasr City district.

August 16, 2013: Saudi king backs Egypt's rulers against 'terrorism'

RIYADH (Reuters) - Saudi King Abdullah called on Arabs on Friday to stand together against "attempts to destabilize" Egypt, in a message of support for the military leadership and an attack on the Muslim Brotherhood. "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its people and government, stood and stands today with its brothers in Egypt against terrorism," he said in a message read out on Saudi television, in an apparent reference to continuing clashes between the Muslim Brotherhood and police. "I call on the honest men of Egypt and the Arab and Muslim nations ... to stand as one man and with one heart in the face of attempts to destabilize a
country that is at the forefront of Arab and Muslim history," he added. Hundreds were killed in Egypt this week when the security forces cleared protest camps set up by the Muslim Brotherhood to demonstrate against the military's ousting of President Mohamed Mursi last month. Saudi Arabia was a close ally of former President Hosni Mubarak - the veteran strongman brought down by a popular uprising in 2011 - and it fears the spread of Muslim Brotherhood ideology to the Gulf monarchies. It pledged $5 billion in aid to Egypt after the Islamist Mursi was ousted. King Abdullah’s statement was Saudi Arabia's first comment on the turmoil in Egypt, a country it sees as an essential ally against Shi’ite Muslim Iran and anti-Western Islamist groups. "All those who meddle in Egypt's internal affairs are inflaming strife," he said, adding that the North African country faces "a conspiracy of plotters" trying to strike at its unity and stability.

August 17, 2013: Pro-Morsy supporters attacked Coptic churches all over Egypt'

CAIRO, Egypt: Muslim brotherhood supporters surmounted large scale attack on Coptic christian synagogs and religious institutions, which will definitely be followed by waves of attacks on moderate muslim Egyptians, will in the long run hurt their fight for their rights, and result in bringing little sympathy from the international community.

August 17, 2013: Gunbattle fought in Cairo mosque as Egypt mulls IB ban’

CAIRO (Reuters) By Issam Abdallah and Crispian Balmer - Security forces cleared a Cairo mosque after a gunbattle with followers of the Muslim Brotherhood on Saturday, while Egypt's army-backed government, facing deepening chaos, considered banning the Islamist group. Three Reuters witnesses saw gunmen shoot from a window of the al-Fath mosque, where supporters of deposed president Mohammed Mursi had taken shelter during ferocious confrontations in the heart of the Egyptian capital on Friday. Another gunman was shown on television shooting from the mosque's minaret and soldiers outside returning fire. Hours later, police moved in and secured the building, making scores of arrests as crowds on the streets cheered them on. It was not clear if anyone died in the clashes - the fourth day of violence in Egypt, which has killed almost 800 people. Troubles were also reported in the second city Alexandria, where an office run by the Muslim Brotherhood was set ablaze. With anger rising on all sides, Prime Minister Hazem el-Beblawi proposed disbanding the Brotherhood, raising the stakes in a bloody struggle between the state
and Islamists for control of the Arab world's most populous nation. "We are not facing political divisions, we are facing a war being waged by extremists developing daily into terrorism," presidential political adviser Mostafa Hegazy told reporters. "We will win this war not only with security procedures, but according to the law and within the framework of human rights." If Beblawi's proposal to disband the Brotherhood is acted on, it would force the group underground and could herald large-scale arrests against its members placed outside the law.

Many Western allies have denounced the recent wave of killings, including the United States, alarmed by the mayhem in a country which has a strategic peace treaty with Israel and operates the Suez Canal, a major artery of global trade. However, Saudi Arabia threw its weight behind the army-backed government on Friday, accusing its old foes in the Muslim Brotherhood of trying to destabilize Egypt. The health ministry said 173 people died in clashes across Egypt on Friday, including 95 in central Cairo, after the Brotherhood called a "Day of Rage" to denounce a crackdown on its followers on Wednesday that killed at least 578 people. Fifty-seven policemen died over the past three days, the interior ministry said. Among those killed on Friday was a son of Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammed Badie, shot dead close to al-Fath mosque, which was rapidly transformed into a makeshift morgue and a refuge for hundreds of Mursi's supporters, looking to escape the bloodshed. The building was surrounded overnight and police fired volleys of tear gas into the carpeted prayer hall in the early afternoon, filling the hall with billowing white smoke and leaving those inside gasping for breath. Soon afterwards gunshots rang out from both sides.

MASS ARRESTS: Egyptian authorities said they rounded up more than 1,000 Islamists after Friday's protests, showing one handcuffed man on television with an automatic gun on his lap. Security sources said Mohamed Al-Zawahiri, the brother of al Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri, had also been detained. "Friday was a very bad, ugly day. There were attacks on police stations, ministries. The situation is very bad," the prime minister told reporters. "There will be no reconciliation with those whose hands have been stained with blood and who turned weapons against the state and its institutions." The Brotherhood was officially dissolved by Egypt's military rulers in 1954, but registered itself as a non-governmental organization in March in a response to a court case brought by opponents of the group who were contesting its legality. Founded in 1928, the movement has deep roots in the provinces and has a legally registered political arm - the Freedom and Justice Party - which was set
up in 2011 after unrest that led to the downfall of the autocratic Hosni Mubarak. The Brotherhood won all five elections that followed the toppling of Mubarak, and Mursi governed the country for just a year until he was undermined by mammoth rallies called by critics who denounced his rule as incompetent and partisan. Army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi says he removed Mursi from office on July 3 to protect the country from possible civil war.

CHURCHES DESTROYED: Brotherhood spokesman Gehad El-Haddad said on Saturday the police had started to arrest the sons and daughters of the organization's leadership in an effort to gain leverage. Despite the bloodshed, the Islamist group has urged its supporters to take to the streets every day this coming week, but there was no sign of large rallies by late Saturday. "Our rejection of the coup regime has become an Islamic, national and ethical obligation that we can never abandon," said the Brotherhood, which has accused the military of plotting the downfall of Mursi to regain the levers of power. In the first attack of its kind yet reported, a bomb blast ripped through the garden wall of the Egyptian consulate in the city of Benghazi on Saturday in neighboring Libya, injuring a security guard. No one claimed immediate responsibility. Worryingly for the Egyptian army, violence was reported across the country on Friday, with deaths reported in at least eight cities and towns, suggesting it might struggle to impose control on the vast, largely desert state. The government said 12 churches had been attacked and burned on Friday, blaming the Islamists for the destruction. Foreign journalists in Cairo said they faced regular harassment as they tried to report on the clashes, with a number detained by police and civilian vigilante groups unhappy with coverage of the disturbances.

Massacre In Egypt’

Updates - Dozens dead as Egyptian forces commit 3rd mass killing of pro-Morsi demonstrators. Security forces have committed a new mass killing of Muslim Brotherhood demonstrators supporting the ousted president, Mohamed Morsi. Dozens of people have been reportedly killed in raids on two pro-Morsi encampments in Cairo. Alastair Beach, Cairo correspondent for The Independent, has been visiting morgues near Rabaa al-Adawiya Square where scores of bodies are reportedly being held. Speaking to us from a hospital where the injured are being treated, Beach says he has personally counted about 83 or 84 bodies today, most of them with gunshot wounds to the head, indicating they have been shot by police snipers.
Egypt’s Coptic Christians face unprecedented reprisals from the Muslim Brotherhood’

CAIRO — Islamist mobs have torched schools and businesses owned by Christians, looted churches and even paraded captive nuns through the streets of a city south of Cairo in a display of rage unseen in Egypt’s recent history. The campaign of killing and arson is retaliation for the tiny Christian community’s support of the military coup that ousted President Mohammed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood government. “The Muslim Brotherhood were the ones who called for aggression [against Christians]. They are responsible,” said the Rev. Khalil Fawzi, a pastor at Kasr El Dubarrah Evangelical Church, the largest evangelical congregation in the Middle East. “Either they are in control or they burn Egypt.” Since the military removed Mr. Morsi seven weeks ago, his supporters have burned at least 44 churches and ransacked more than 20 other Christian institutions throughout Egypt. Most of the attacks were in regions south of Cairo. In the capital, police and neighborhood watch groups protected many churches and Christian-owned shops. At least six Christians and one Muslim working at a Christian-owned shop have been killed since Mr. Morsi was removed July 3, human rights activists said. Nearly 900 people in all have died in clashes between security forces and Morsi supporters. Coptic Christians make up about 9 percent of Egypt’s population of 85 million, and other Christian denominations about 1 percent. The vast majority of Egyptians are Sunni Muslims.

MOB ASSAULTS NUNS: The most shocking assault against Christians occurred at a Roman Catholic school in the Bani Suef province south of Cairo when Islamists captured three nuns and several school employees. The extremists “paraded us like prisoners of war,” said Sister Manal, the school principal. After six hours of abuse, they escaped from the mob after a Muslim woman who taught at the school sheltered them in her home. In another attack in Beni Suef, a volunteer for the Coptic Orphans international adoption agency was hospitalized after more than a dozen people assaulted him as he was trying to rescue his sister and nephew. The organization, which has been active in Egypt since 1998, called the rise in violence against Copts “unprecedented.” Islamists have been assauling Coptic Christians since the 2011 revolution that overthrew the autocratic Hosni Mubarak, but the attacks have intensified since the ouster of Mr. Morsi, the country’s first democratically elected leader. Coptic Pope Tawadros II stood beside Egypt’s leading Sunni imam, Sheik Ahmed El Tayeb, and Gen. Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi as the military leader announced the overthrow and detention of Mr. Morsi. Millions of protesters demanded
Mr. Morsi’s removal in June after he imposed increasingly harsh Islamic laws and failed to revive a crippled economy. Egypt’s Coptic Church last week said it backed the military’s move against “armed violent groups and black terrorism.”

The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups have denounced Christians at public events, over social media and on pro-Morsi TV channels. However, the Muslim Brotherhood and the radical Islamist group Gamaa Islameya have denied responsibility for the attacks. “Although some Coptic leaders may have supported or even participated in the July 3 coup, for one reason or another, no such attacks can be justifiable,” Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Murad Ali said. “Ongoing acts of vandalism are aimed at damaging our reputation, demonizing our peaceful revolution and finding justification for the July 3 coup commanders and collaborators to continue their acts of repression and violence.” Still, the Facebook page of the Muslim Brotherhood’s local branch in the Cairo suburb of Helwan accuses the Coptic Church of siding with the military and warned, “For every action there is a reaction.” Mr. Fawzi, the evangelical pastor, suspects the Islamists are trying to goad Christians into a violent response. “They hoped the Christians will retaliate by killing and a civil war would start,” he said. “I praise Christians for their patriotic attitude.”

POLICE FAILED TO HELP: Human rights advocates criticize the Egyptian police and military for failing to protect Christians. “The police have never come to protect the churches or to respond after the attacks,” said Ishak Ibrahim, a researcher who is tracking the attacks on the Christian community for the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, a Cairo-based nonprofit. “Also, no firetrucks have been sent.” “Egyptian security officials bear responsibility for their failure to protect churches and Christian communities against predictable reprisal attacks,” said Joe Storck, the Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. Gen. el-Sissi told state TV that he ordered the armed forces to repair all damaged churches in “recognition of the historical and national role played by our Coptic brothers.” The military, which controls up to a third of Egypt’s economy, manages businesses in the construction industry and handles construction of its own buildings and roads. Even before the outbreak of violence that followed the dispersal of the pro-Morsi sit-ins last week, the Coptic community was under increasing attack, Mr. Ibrahim said. “Various Islamist groups, including the Brotherhood, have been calling for the attacks on Christians and churches,” he said, “although no one knows who is actually doing the specific attacks.” Coptic Christians
have expressed strong support for Gen. el-Sissi’s crackdown on the Brotherhood and the arrests of many of its leaders. “I’m proud of what the army is doing and what Sissi is doing,” said Mariam Farrag, a shopkeeper in Coptic Cairo, a part of the capital with some of the world’s oldest Christian relics and sites. “Things will be great again,” she said as she smiled and restocked her shop. Source: The Washington Times

August 19, 2013: Egyptian capital becomes battle zone amid crisis’

By AYA BATRAWY CAIRO (AP) - Soldiers fired their rifles in the air to keep a crowd from attacking supporters of ousted President Mohammed Morsi as they were being taken, one by one, out of the Al-Fath mosque in Cairo where they had been besieged by security forces overnight. One man in the crowd, however, was able to reach over the soldiers and strike a detained protester with a stick. Others chanted against Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood group. The scene encapsulated the venomous mood in Cairo.

The streets of Egypt's capital have become a deadly battleground between Morsi's supporters and backers of the military that overthrew him. The crisis has severed friendships and, in some cases, turned neighbor against neighbor in the city of more than 18 million people. More than 450 people have been killed in Cairo over the past four days, just over half the country's nationwide death toll during the week of violence. Hundreds of those victims died when Egyptian security forces attacked two pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo on Wednesday. How events play out in Cairo could largely determine whether Egypt can step back from the brink of chaos. Over the weekend, street battles raged throughout the metropolis, once a stable corner of the Middle East. Armed civilians and security forces fought armed Morsi supporters and protesters. People openly fired automatic rifles and pistols at one another on main overpasses and roads. Most residents cowered in their homes, many staying clear of windows and balconies.

Metro stations near protest sites are closed, and military tanks enforce an army-imposed state of emergency that grants security forces broad powers to make arrests. Residents have locked entrances to their apartment buildings, and police stations and prisons have come under attack. The city, normally bustling at all hours of the day and night, now slips into an eerie quiet interrupted at times by gunfire during an 11-hour curfew that starts at 7 p.m. The usually gridlocked streets are devoid of nighttime traffic. Vigilantes and police dressed in civilian clothes stand at makeshift roadblocks, frisking people without identifying themselves. Many brandish guns. The Interior Ministry warned civilians Sunday against
breaking the curfew to man checkpoints. Some grocery stores are running low on merchandise, with bread cleared from the shelves and residents stocking up on water and canned food. Banks opened for just three hours Sunday after being closed for four days. Others cannot see friends and family who live on opposite ends of the city because marches and protests have made road conditions unpredictable. For taxi driver Ahmed Hosni, the blocked roads, violence and curfew have choked his income. He spends his nights instead at a civilian checkpoint in the poor neighborhood of Basateen. Hosni had voted for Morsi, but a year later joined the calls for his ouster. He also took part in mass protests last month in support of military action against "potential terrorism" by the Brotherhood. He said he was upset by the bloodshed that followed. "We are living off what we have in the coming days," said the 31-year-old, who provides for his mother and siblings. "God is with us all these coming days." Along major roads of the upscale neighborhood of Mohandiseen, apartment buildings are riddled with bullet holes, the sidewalks are strewn with broken glass, public benches have been ripped out of the ground and several cars are smashed from last week's fighting, sparked by anger at police for clearing out the sit-ins. Stores were looted in the mayhem.

Dozens of policemen and tanks stand guard outside a main mosque where the Brotherhood's supporters tried to create another encampment in Mohandiseen. Mohammed Hamed Abdel-Khairy, who owns 20 area stores that sell men's suits, stood outside one of his shops to monitor employees as they reinforced iron bars on the door and taped newspapers to the glass to keep thieves from peering in. He said three stores around him were robbed Wednesday during the clashes on El-Batal Ahmed Abdel-Aziz Street. "This will definitely affect my business. ... I don't believe we will sell at all this month," he said. Abdel-Khairy said that he carries a licensed gun and that his employees have truncheons in the stores for safety. He defended the clearing of the two pro-Morsi sit-ins by security forces. Riot police, backed by bulldozers, armored cars and snipers, killed more than 378 people in the raids on the encampments. "There was no other way," he said. "How can we eat and live if protests are cutting off roads?" He said that mistakes were made by security forces when unarmed protesters were killed alongside some brandishing weapons, but he brushed it off as God's will. He reiterated a familiar refrain sounded by many Egyptians, government officials and local media: "You are dealing with a highly trained terrorist group." That hardened sentiment is echoed elsewhere in Cairo. Brotherhood figure Salah Soltan told Al-Jazeera that he was stopped by armed men at a makeshift checkpoint who recognized him from his television appearances. The men, who he suspects were state
security officials in civilian clothes, forced him and a sheik with him out of the car and took their phones and identification cards. He said the two were then threatened with violence and forced to walk through narrow alleyways where residents angry with the Brotherhood tried to attack them. He said a local sheik held the residents off with his pleas. "One group wanted to kill us, one group wanted to hand us over to the army," he said. An influential local resident intervened after neighbors pulled weapons on one another in arguments over how to deal with Soltan, who is wanted by police on charges of inciting violence. Soltan said the local leader helped sneak the two away.

A little more than two years ago, the scene in Cairo was starkly different. While there was some looting and a curfew that was less strictly enforced, Egypt was largely united in its bid to overthrow autocratic President Hosni Mubarak after 30 years. There was hope the revolution's rallying cry of "bread, freedom and social justice" would yield results. Young activists painted sidewalks, planted flowers and cleaned up the streets. Later, when Morsi was narrowly elected last year, the country's first freely elected president stood in Tahrir Square, the site of anti-government protests, and opened his suit jacket to show he didn't need a bulletproof vest or the tight security of his deposed predecessor. But Morsi, a longtime Brotherhood leader, failed to include other factions in his decision-making and cast his critics as conspirators and Mubarak-era loyalists. Political divisions deepened and the economy tumbled. A little before curfew over the weekend, men gathered for daily rituals of tea, cigarettes and conversation. A group sitting at the local corner coffee shop in the middle-class neighborhood of Shobra said the decision by the country's army chief to oust Morsi saved the country from a Syria-like scenario. They criticized Western nations that called it a coup. Ahmed Ragab sat on a plastic chair underneath a street sign plastered with a rundown sticker that urged people to "Go Down" to the streets June 30 and oust Morsi. Ragab, a government employee who took part in those protests, said he supports the crackdown on the Brotherhood. "If you have roaches in the kitchen that are eating away at your food. What do you do? You spray them," he said. "These are not Islamists. They are terrorists."

August 24, 2013: Egypt Leading activist says the revolution back at square one’

By Tom Perry: CAIRO (Reuters) - Ahmed Maher's April 6 movement helped lead the uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak in 2011. With Mubarak now out of jail, he says the revolution is back to square one, and
could take a generation to prevail. After the bloodiest week in Egypt's modern history, Maher fears the consequences of the hatred that has split the country into two rival camps: the army-led state and its backers, and the Islamists they removed from power on July 3. "Our problem is there is a wave of madness. People tell you: 'We must eradicate them'," Maher said, saying such attitudes had emerged on both sides. "There must be a third voice." The assessment from one of Egypt's best-known activists underlines the bleak outlook for the country whose January 25, 2011, uprising inspired pro-democracy revolts across the Arab world. Maher, 32, says it may now be another generation before the goals of the revolution - freedom, social justice and dignity - are secured. He spoke at a rundown Cairo office where the walls were covered with stickers bearing witness to non-stop activism since 2011: campaigns first against the generals who replaced Mubarak, and later against the elected Muslim Brotherhood-led government. Protest work itself is becoming a victim of the latest bloodshed: April 6 canceled a rally on Friday against Mubarak's release out of fears it might lead to violence.

"We view ourselves back at square one, because what is happening now could be more dangerous, more complicated than what was there before January 25, 2011," Maher said. "We don't fully understand what is happening in the new regime," he said. "There are fears of the return of the old regime, its people and methods." "There are also extremist, radical armed groups." Maher's April 6 was one of the youth movements that galvanized Egyptians during the 18-day uprising that ended when the army forced Mubarak aside on February 11, 2011. But like most secular groups, it failed to make much of a political mark once Mubarak was toppled - a failure that helped the Islamists win election after election, culminating with last year's presidential vote that brought Mohamed Mursi to power. April 6 backed Mursi in that vote, but later turned its nationwide activist network against him, echoing critics who said his Muslim Brotherhood was seeking to entrench its power even as it failed in government. It gathered 2 million signatures for the Tamarod petition campaign that helped to mobilize protests against Mursi. "When the army came to power after January 25, the alternative was the Brotherhood. Then the Brotherhood came, and the alternative was the military," he said. "The problem was the two-sided equation from the start. There must be a real alternative."

DIFFICULT TO SPEAK OUT: The Brotherhood is now facing one of the toughest crackdowns in its 85-year history. Since Mursi's downfall, the security forces have killed at least 1,000 of his supporters, most of them
last week when the police used force to break up their two Cairo protest camps. Some 100 soldiers and police were also killed in bloodshed that has raised fears that an armed Islamist insurrection could ensue, even as the Brotherhood continues to disavow violence. The police are arresting Brotherhood leaders and supporters across the country. State media say Egypt is fighting terrorism. Maher said public hatred of the Brotherhood was now running so deep that it was difficult for activists to speak out about worrying trends such as the re-imposition of a state of emergency. "Everyone is directed towards the idea of the 'war on terror', and if there are violations, they are being ignored." Mubarak's release on Thursday was a symbolic victory for supporters of the veteran autocrat. Though he is being retried for ordering the killing of protesters in the 2011 uprising, there are no longer any legal grounds for his detention. "Naturally, there are fears, especially after the release of Mubarak," Maher said. "But as a revolution, we knew at the start there could be many setbacks ... We were expecting difficulties. But nobody thought it would be this complicated." "I should be depressed, and I am depressed, but I still have hope, even with these complications, the violence, these fears. I still have confidence that one day we will see a new Egypt," he said. "My generation might not see these changes. We might be paving the way for the new generation to see these changes."

August 24, 2013: Egypt reopened the only legal crossing from Gaza into Egypt, after having closed it for five days because of a terrorist threat. Since the military took control of the Egyptian government on July 3rd there have been growing restrictions on Gazans entering Egypt.

August 27, 2013: In the Egyptian capital some 10,000 Moslem Brotherhood members and supporters demonstrated against the new military government. At least six demonstrators were killed and over 50 wounded. There were smaller demonstrations in other cities. The Islamic conservatives have little public support. The army, on the other hand, has a lot of public support. That will change if the economic situation does not make some significant improvements. Meanwhile, on the Israeli border one Egyptian man was killed and another wounded when they would not stop moving towards the border fence and Israeli troops opened fire.

August 30, 2013: Egypt's Christians Restrain Anger After Church Attacks by Morsy Supporters’

MINYA (AFP) - Coptic Christians in the Upper Egyptian city of Minya are restraining their anger despite a wave of devastating attacks on their churches and institutions by enraged Islamists. Tensions are still running
high more than two weeks after the attacks in the city some 250km south of Cairo but there have been no calls for vengeance, nor any fiery rhetoric. “I say to the Islamists who attacked us that we are not afraid of their violence and their desire to exterminate the Copts,” said Botros Fahim Awad Hanna, the archbishop of Minya. “If we are not hitting back, it is not because we are afraid, but because we are sensible,” he said.

Enraged by a bloody crackdown mid-August on protests in support of ousted president Mohammad Mursi in Cairo, Islamists lashed out at Coptic Christians in Minya, accusing them of backing the military that toppled the head of state. The Copts, who account for some 10 million out of Egypt’s population of 80 million, had already suffered persecution in recent years. But they say they have never had such a systematic campaign as this. “We were expecting a violent reaction but not on this scale, which suggests it was well prepared,” the archbishop said.

In the greater Minya province, where Christians account for about one-fifth of the five million population, Christians say they have suffered systematic and coordinated violence since mid-August. According to Human Rights Watch, more than 40 churches have been attacked in Egypt since August 14, when the security forces launched a bloody crackdown against demonstrations demanding the return of Morsi, who was toppled by the military on July 3. The attacks have been concentrated in Minya and Assiut, in central Egypt, where attackers torched 11 and eight churches respectively, the US-based rights group said. Islamists accused Egypt’s Copts of throwing their weight behind the military coup that removed from power the Muslim Brotherhood, from which Mursi hails. The perception was fuelled by the fact that Coptic Pope Tawadros II appeared with army chief General Abdul Fattah Al Sissi when he spoke on television to announce Mursi’s removal from office. At the ruins of Saint Moses’ church in Minya, Bassam Youssef, a Copt, despairs at the sight of the rounded building with its clock tower, now ravaged by fire. “Around 500 extremists attacked the building and set it on fire,” Youssef recalled. “We did not expect such violence,” he added, showing pictures of the church before its destruction. “Look at this beautiful mosaic that decorated the interior balcony, there’s nothing left and we will need five to six years to rebuild everything.” The centre of Minya is a tangle of shops bearing a mix of Christian and Muslim names, and home to both churches and mosques, some just dozens of metres from each other. Not far from Saint Moses’ church, Um Saleh watched over what is left of the Coptic school, which was also set alight.
“We heard them calling for jihad and we rushed out of the area, terrified,” she recalled. From one of the windows of the school, it is possible to see the scorched dome of the Prince Theodore church. Several metres away, a Coptic orphanage has also been burned. “May God forgive you despite what you have done,” reads a slogan daubed on the walls of the orphanage, now empty of its young wards. At the headquarters of the Jesuit Brothers’ development association in the town, Father Biman is working to clear the debris after the attacks. Fire destroyed the library, a nursery and the offices, but spared the nearby church of Saint Mark, which has stood there for 125 years. “I am very angry,” Biman says, before regaining his composure. “I also have compassion for the attackers, who have been brainwashed”. He points to his T-shirt, which has a slogan on it calling to spread love around the world. Maria Hanaa, an official at the Jesuit association, sees the attacks as a direct result of the community’s antipathy towards Morsi. “We demonstrated against president Morsi and it is the first time we did it, and we paid the price,” she says. “We marched because we felt that we were going to lose the country. We thought that they were going to bring justice, but we saw that they were only looking for power”.

September 5, 2013: In Cairo the Egyptian Interior Minister escaped injury after a bomb went off near his car. A few days later a terrorist group in Gaza took credit for the attack.

In Cairo a bomb exploded at a police station but there were no injuries. Another bomb was found on the rail line between Suez and Ismailia where it was disabled.

September 7, 2013: Egypt launched its largest military operation in Sinai since the 1973 War. Twelve villages were visited by troops who searched buildings and seemed to be looking for specific individuals. There was resistance in several villages and several dozen casualties, including nine terrorists and two soldiers dead and over a dozen terrorists arrested. These raids are to continue for at least a few days.

September 9, 2013: In Sinai 1 Islamic terrorist was killed when the terrorists clashed with soldiers along a road.

The government will enforce the prohibition against unlicensed clerics preaching in Mosques. There are believed to be about 55,000 such illegal preachers, most of them Morsi supporters.
September 11, 2013: In the northern Sinai (Rafah, a town near Gaza) 2 suicide car bombs killed 7 soldiers and 2 terrorists. Over the last week army raids in the area have killed 30 Islamic terrorists and arrested at least as many.

September 12, 2013: For the first time Egyptian armored vehicles have entered Gaza, with two M-1 tanks going past the fence marking the border zone. The tanks did not go past the wall that marks the extent of Hamas controlled territory.

September 13, 2013: As usual, Friday brought more pro-Morsi demonstrators out on to the streets. Friday is the Moslem day of prayer and the day when the Mosques have the most people showing up to pray and hear sermons. Most of the clerics are pro-Morsi. In Cairo there are also more anti-Morsi demonstrations, and police are having a more difficult time keeping the pro and anti-Morsi crowds apart.

September 14, 2013: In the Sinai Peninsula the Egyptian military launched an offensive against Islamic terrorists. Within 5 days 29 Islamic terrorists had been killed, 30 arrested, and several caches of weapons and bomb making materials were seized. The army suffered about a dozen casualties, including 3 dead. The offensive continues, mostly in the north near Gaza. Police also raided Islamic radical camps set up outside Cairo (housing demonstrators who went into the Cairo to call for Islamic president Morsi to be reinstated). Some people from these camps formed mobs to attack police stations near the camps.

September 16, 2013: The Egyptian government will shorten the nightly curfew from 7 to 5 hours and extended the state of emergency (martial law) by 2 months. The state of emergency was first declared on August 14th, when the army cleared 2 large camps outside Cairo that were occupied by Morsi supporters from other parts of the country. About 1,000 people were killed in that operation.

September 18, 2013: Egypt, like many countries that support the destruction of Israel, has long been hospitable to Islamic terrorist groups that seek to carry out attacks against Israel. As many other Arab nations have discovered, this policy often does not work out as intended. Not only have the hosted terrorists been unable to make many successful attacks on Israel, but these same Islamic radical organizations tend to turn on their hosts. This happens quite frequently. Every decade or so Egypt has had to carry out a major counter-terror campaign to eliminate the Islamic
terrorists who talk about destroying Israel but instead end up attacking the Egyptian government because it is not Islamic enough.

This time around the problem is more complex, because the terrorist group Hamas has been in control of Gaza (and 40 percent of the Palestinians living adjacent to Israel) and has been hosting even more Islamic terror groups inside Gaza. This includes Islamic terrorists who also want to turn Egypt into a religious dictatorship, no matter what the cost. Hamas tried to keep these anti-Egypt radical groups under control, but the best Hamas could do was convince the Egyptians that they were doing just that. Hamas lied, and the anti-Egypt terrorists have spread to the Sinai Peninsula (a largely desert area that lies between Gaza, and Israel, and the Suez Canal). In the Sinai the terrorists have joined with the Bedouin smuggling gangs and have been attacking Egyptian police and government officials. The Bedouin want to be left alone (something these nomads have been seeking for thousands of years) and the Islamic terrorists want to use the Sinai as a base area for attacks into the more populated parts of Egypt.

There are only about a million people in the Sinai and over 83 million in the rest of Egypt. About half the Sinai population is Bedouin, the rest are Egyptians who came as government officials or to work on the Suez Canal or the new tourist enterprises in the Sinai. Discriminated against by Egyptians, and feeling disdain for Egyptian culture, many Bedouin find themselves unable to get jobs and their traditional lifestyle (herding and trade) is no longer able to support all of them. Smuggling has always been popular and people are eager to get into Israel (for jobs) and terror groups in Gaza pay well for weapons. Terrorists in Sinai have cash and will pay for shelter and other assistance from Bedouin. In the last two years the number of terrorists operating in Sinai has gone from a few hundred to over a thousand. These guys have nowhere to go but Egypt because the Israeli counter-terror measures of the last decade have made it virtually impossible to carry out terrorist attacks inside Israel.

Since another popular uprising (backed by the military) overthrew the recently elected Islamic government in early July, the Sinai terrorists have been at war with Egypt. Despite vigorous and frequent military and police raids in Sinai, most of the terrorists there have remained hidden, except when they attack the security forces or government officials. Noting that some of these terrorists still had bases in Sinai, for the last month Egypt has been shutting off access from Sinai into Gaza. That means destroying over 300 smuggling tunnels and destroying all buildings from the Gaza
border fence and 500 meters into Egypt. This makes digging new tunnels more difficult and easier to detect. The one legal crossing from Gaza to Egypt is shut much of the time and when open it is carefully monitored. The Egyptian Navy has more ships guarding the Gaza coast and now fires on boats from Gaza that try to enter Egyptian waters without permission.

The Egyptians are now doing what the Israelis have been doing since Hamas took over Gaza in 2007 (two years after Israeli security forces pulled out). While Egypt has officially been at peace with Israel since 1979, the government has always supported anti-Israel attitudes in the media and among the population. Egypt also supported Palestinian resistance to Israel and has only, with great reluctance, cracked down on Hamas (which has always said its main goal was the destruction of Israel). Ever since Israel declared independence in 1948, all Arabs have been encouraged by their leaders to seek the destruction of Israel. This effort has been a colossal failure and has led to many Islamic radical groups that eventually turned on the Arab governments perceived as not eager enough to attack Israel. Thus, Egyptian leaders complain openly about their distaste for killing fellow Arabs while Israel remains untouched.

September 20, 2013: The Egyptian security forces have sent more personnel into Sinai and are openly admitting that the current raids and sweeps are meant to crush the Islamic terror groups in Sinai and isolate Gaza (a Palestinian territory run by Islamic terror group Hamas since 2007). In the last two months the Egyptians have made nearly 400 arrests in Sinai and killed over 100 Islamic terrorists. Over 10 tons of weapons have been seized so far, many of them had come from Gaza. There are now almost daily clashes in Sinai between Egyptian security forces and Islamic terrorists. Since June the Egyptian military has found and shut down some 95 percent of the Gaza smuggling tunnels. They are aiming for 100 percent by demolishing all buildings within a kilometer of the Gaza border. Shutting down the tunnels has reduced Gaza GDP by about 15 percent. The tunnels were built to get around cargo checks and customs fees at the official crossings from Egypt and Israel. Hamas made up for its lost customs income by charging the tunnel operators fees. Egypt tolerated the tunnels until this year, when they realized that they were a major source of personnel and equipment for the growing number of Islamic terrorists in Sinai. These terrorists were originally supposed to be attacking Israel but have increasingly become hostile to the Egyptian government as well. Meanwhile, the 2 months of pro-Morsi (the Islamic activist president deposed by mass demonstrations and an army coup in July) demonstrations have left over a 1,200 dead in Egypt, most of them
Morsi supporters. Most Egyptian counter-terrorism efforts are concentrated in the areas (along the Nile River) where most Egyptians live. The Sinai (where only about 1 percent of Egyptians live) has, until recently, been seen as a minor nuisance. That has changed.

September 20, 2013: In Sinai two days of police raids resulted in at least 85 arrests of terrorism suspects.

In Sinai an armored vehicle were hit by a roadside bomb, wounding two soldiers.

September 25, 2013: Egypt bans Muslim Brotherhood'

Deutsche Welle - An Egyptian court has banned the Muslim Brotherhood. But Egypt's oldest Islamist organization plans to continue its protests against the military-installed government. The government of Mohammed Morsi has been toppled. Most of the Muslim Brotherhood's leaders have been thrown in jail. And on Monday, a Cairo court dealt the movement another blow Judge Mohammed al-Sayed has imposed a ban on it. The lawsuit that led to the ban claimed that the Brotherhood represented a "harm to national security." The court also ordered the group's assets seized. The Brotherhood can appeal against the ruling. Since former President Morsi was ousted by the military on July 3, the Egyptian security forces have arrested more than 2,000 members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Nearly the entire leadership of the group now sits behind bars. Many members are in hiding - they hardly dare to leave their homes.

Revolution is getting bigger: Among them is a surgeon from a middle class neighborhood in Cairo who asked to remain anonymous. The father of a family, he has been active in the Muslim Brotherhood for years. He accuses the military government of reversing Egypt's progress: "They want to take the country back 50 or 60 years, when the Muslim Brotherhood was a banned organization and was not allowed to operate publicly. We're back in those days again." But the Islamists are continuing their peaceful demonstrations in Cairo and other major cities in Egypt. The surgeon is convinced that these protests will gain momentum in response to the court-ordered ban. "We are already considering new methods to put those responsible for the putsch under pressure and to force them to talk with us," he said. "The revolution is getting bigger. The military regime is making new enemies every day."
Social services shutdown: Some members of the Muslim Brotherhood believe that the ban will further damage the already crippled Egyptian economy, and eventually turn popular opinion against the military-backed government. In the past, the Muslim Brotherhood's nationwide network of social services helped fill gaps in the public welfare system, providing the poor with soup kitchens, help with finding jobs and free medicine. But since Morsi's ouster, the Brotherhood has had to shut down many of its aid programs. Not all Egyptians are upset about this. Critics have long accused the Brotherhood of using social services to buy support. "Mohammed Morsi was of no use to me," Mustafa Khaled, a strict Muslim, told DW. "He said good things, but he did nothing. I am a poor and have five kids. The Muslim Brotherhood hasn't done anything for me." The court-imposed ban is the opening act of a judicial marathon for the Brotherhood. In October, dozens of leading members of the organization will face trial, among them Mohammed Morsi. And in December, a court in Alexandria will decide whether to classify the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.

Enemy of the state: Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser was the first to ban the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954, after the Islamist group fought a bloody power struggle with the army. Hosni Mubarak, who was overthrown in 2011, also threw many Brotherhood members behind bars. But overall, Mubarak granted the Brotherhood greater freedom. Under Mubarak, members were allowed to preach in mosques and run for parliament as independent candidates. After the 2011 revolution, the Brotherhood established a political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party. In March of this year, the Brotherhood registered itself as a non-government organization. But the court-imposed ban threatens to turn the Brotherhood's status as a legally permitted organization into a short intermezzo in its 85-year history.

Fears of radicalization: In front of a mosque in the south of Cairo, well known as a favorite meeting point for the Islamists, the ban is being heatedly discussed. A student with a long beard and wearing a white robe says he supports the Muslim Brotherhood. He starts railing against the country's new strongman, army chief Abdel Fattah el-Sissi: "It's just all a big show, organized by the intelligence agencies. El-Sissi offends our intelligence. Where is the freedom and human dignity in the things that el-Sissi does?" There is widespread concern in Egypt that factions of the Muslim Brotherhood could go underground and radicalize. In the past few weeks, there have been dozens of bloody attacks against the security forces, with more than 100 police officers left dead. At the beginning of
September, a jihadist group based in the Sinai Peninsula tried to kill Interior Minister Mohammed Ibrahim with an explosive device. The assassination attempt failed.

Middle East North Africa (MENA) & The Egyptian Uprising’

Side note: Introduction and Historical Background - (Somaliland Sun Commentary) Middle East is mostly occupied by Arab countries and for the last five decades there had been a chaos and conflict between Israel supported by western developed countries and Palestine supported by most Arab states. Arabs fought bravely against Israel in many different battles, for example Suez war in 1956, Sixth Day in 1967 war and Yom Kippur in 1973 war. Arabs had the upper hand at the beginning but after military assistance for Israel from U.S.A and Europe they defeated and conquered certain strategic locations like Sinai Peninsula and the Golan heights. After these wars most Arabian countries realized that wiping Israel out of the map was an impossible task and as long as west supported the Jews will be remaining the winners, so Israel was recognized by Egypt and later by most Arab states. Palestine remained under Israeli occupation. Their territories being devastated, their intellectuals put in harsh prisons and anyone who throws stones is responded with fire. Arabs neglected Palestinians more than forty years, they watched how they were massacred, raped and humiliated their fellow brothers.

Generally speaking, in the last three years Egypt experienced one of the most amazing historical incidence after long ruling military regime Hosni Mubarak was overthrown by civilian peaceful demonstrations where he finally resigned from his presidency. He was put in the prison and charged crimes against humanity. Egypt held free and fair elections, Muslim brotherhood defeated overwhelmingly the secular opposition led by Amr Mussa and Albaradici, then Mohamed Mursi was crowned as the ultimate Egyptian president. He formed his government but within a year again the same thing happened after millions of Egyptians remained unemployed and they began protesting in Tahrir Square. The army made an ultimatum within 48 hours: opposition and Muslim brotherhood settle their difference or an action will be taken. There was no mutual agreement between the two and the army lead by Azzizi( already named for this post by Mursi) made a military coup where the legitimate Egyptian government was ousted from the power. Again the army rules, Mursi was jailed and still remain in the prison, then Mursi supporters started protesting but the army using tanks and snipers murdered and the death toll remain
thousands. The most surprising incident is that the Egyptian Supreme Court released the dictator Hosni Mubarak by telling that there were no enough evidences for his crime against humanity. I do not know exactly what will be next but one point is sure and that is the military is back in Egyptian rule and remain that way unless muslim brotherhood do not compromise. Hosni Mubarak was released and what we wait is his nomination as president again, who knows?

Israel has allowed Egyptian F-16s to fly over Gaza. Egyptian military operations in Sinai (which Gaza borders) are restricted by the 1979 peace treaty and both nations must agree to allow more Egyptian troops in the area. The treaty considers Sinai a buffer zone, to prevent Egypt from threatening Israel with attack, as it did many times in the 1950s and 60s. But because of the growing Islamic terrorist presence in Sinai and Gaza, Israel has relaxed the restrictions. So for the first time since 1979, Egyptian warplanes were in the air along Israel’s southern border.

Turkey is now accused of cooperating with Iranian counterintelligence by revealing the names of ten Iranians in Turkey who had been seen (by Turkish intelligence agents) meeting with Israeli intelligence officials. For a decade now the Islamic government of Turkey has been battling Turkish secularists and trying to improve relations with other Islamic countries (including ancient rival Iran). This new policy meant adopting an anti-Israel attitude after decades of close relations with the Jewish state. The Turkish betrayal occurred at least four years ago but was kept quiet until now by all concerned (including the Americans). But the Turkish cooperation with Iran was an open secret among senior government officials in the U.S. and Israel that eventually got to the media.

Despite this increased violence in the West Bank, Hamas has succeeded in halting most rocket attacks (by smaller rival terror groups) against Israel. That, in turn, reduces Israeli retaliatory attacks. But Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria all have major problems with Islamic radical violence. Jordan is dealing with more Islamic terror group threats but has so far kept a lid on it. Israel cooperates closely with the Jordanians on counter terrorism matters and has done so for decades. Egypt is now being more cooperative in this area. Such relations with Lebanon and the Syrian rebels in this area are much weaker and informal. So far Israel is an island of calm in an increasingly violent neighborhood.

In Gaza Hamas is under increasing criticism because of its censorship policies and efforts to impose Islamic lifestyle rules on everyone. The head of Hamas is calling for another violent Palestinian uprising against Israel.
That is only possible in the West Bank, where half a million Israelis live alongside two point one million Palestinians. There has been an increase in Palestinian attacks there over the last few months. Israeli "settlers" have been attacking right back. Last July the Israeli government announced that from now on Jewish residents of the West Bank making "price tag" (reparative) attacks will be treated like terrorists. This gives the police more power to investigate and prosecute these crimes. These price tag attacks are usually in retaliation for the Israeli government dismantling illegal settler structures in the West Bank or as revenge for Palestinians attacking the settlements or settlers. Price tag attacks represent a shift in settler attitudes over the last few years. For decades the settlers could be depended on to be passive after a Palestinian attack, letting the Israeli police and military look for the culprit. But now the settlers are increasingly launching "price tag" counterattacks. The price tag refers to what the Palestinians must suffer for every attack on Israelis, or for Israeli police interfering with settler activities. This is vigilante justice, and it does more damage to Palestinians than Israeli police efforts to catch and prosecute Palestinian attackers. The Palestinians are not accustomed to this kind of swift payback, and they do not like it. Israel has been under growing public and international pressure to crack down more vigorously on the vigilantes. This became especially urgent because the attacks are much more common and are even extending to feuds between factions of Jewish religious extremists. The Palestinians are still committing most of the terror attacks, but the Jewish terrorists are catching up.

In Sinai an armored vehicle were hit by a roadside bomb, wounding two soldiers.

October 6, 2013: In Egypt at least fifty-three people died from political violence. Near the Suez Canal Islamic terrorists killed six policemen. Most of the deaths occurred in the capital where police battled Islamic radicals who are trying to overthrow the military government and halt new elections.

October 7, 2013: Terrorist violence continued in Egypt, with ten policemen and soldiers killed in several attacks.

October 8, 2013: In the southern Sinai a suicide car bomber attacked an Egyptian police compound and killed two people. An Islamic radical organization took credit the next day. In two other attacks two soldiers were killed.
October 9, 2013: The United States announced it would protest the Egyptian army takeover of the government last July by withholding over seven-hundred-million in military aid. Israel protested this decision, as the Egyptian army had removed an Islamic government that was very hostile to Israel and democracy in general.

October 17, 2013: In the Sinai Egyptian police killed six Islamic terrorists who were preparing to attack a checkpoint outside al Arish airport.

October 18, 2013: In the Sinai Egyptian Islamic terrorists killed a policeman.

October 20, 2013: In Egypt gunmen fired on a wedding party outside a Christian church near the capital, killing four people.

October 22, 2013: Despite all the unrest in Egypt, the economy grew about two percent in the last year. Before the uprising began in 2011, the economy was growing at the rate of about seven percent a year. The first year saw the economy contract but by 2013 massive financial aid (mainly from oil-rich Arabs) helped turn things around. This infusion of cash also fed inflation, which is now running at over ten percent a year. Meanwhile, Islamic radicals are still trying to get the Islamic government restored. The army removed the Islamic president and other officials in July, after massive popular demonstrations called for this. The Islamic radicals have apparently gone to war with the government and the government has asked the courts to ban the Islamic political parties. The army still has more public support, but many of the Islamic radicals see themselves as on a Mission From God and are undeterred by logic and popular opinion. This is a repeat of the 1990s, when Islamic Brotherhood radicals tried to impose a religious dictatorship via a terror campaign. This time around, the terrorists are trying to limit civilian casualties, which turned popular opinion against them in the 1990s and led to their defeat. It remains to be seen if these new tactics will change the outcome.

November 1, 2013: Egypt: Govt, Ethiopia, Sudan to Hold Fresh Meeting Monday On Nile Dam'

Egypt state Information Service (Cairo): Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation Mohamed Abdel Muttaaleb said that Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan will hold a new round of talks starting Monday to weigh the regional impact of a giant dam being built on a Nile River tributary in Ethiopia after earlier studies proved questionable. A meeting of water officials from the three nations in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, on 4 November will discuss
the impact of the hydroelectric project on downstream countries. The minister said a new round of talks would be held between ministers and delegates of the three countries over the coming weeks. "Next week's meeting will be the first of a series of talks between the three nations aiming to reach a settlement," according to Abdel-Muttaleb. "Dialogue is fundamental to furthering the interests of the three countries, and that's what Egypt is looking forward to in the near future," he added. The minister made it clear that Egypt seeks to bolster cooperation with the Nile Basin counties as major strategic allies.

November 3, 2013: Water Resources Ministers of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan Will Start Meetings On Nile Water' Egypt State Information Service (Cairo): Egypt: Egyptian Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation Mohamed Abdel-Motedleb headed Monday to Sudan on a two-day visit for talks with his Sudanese and Ethiopian counterparts on the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. The conferees will review a report of the tripartite-committee, which assessed the dam's impact on Egypt's and Sudan's quota of Nile water. The meeting is meant to reach political and institutional agreements on cooperation mechanisms between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia.

November 3, 2013: Egypt On Edge Ahead of Morsi Trial'

Cairo, Egypt — Security is tight ahead of the trial of Egypt's deposed president Mohamed Morsi, set to open Monday in Cairo. Animosity is running high on all sides, and a renewed wave of anti-Americanism prompted by the visit of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry adds to the tensions. Morsi is charged with inciting murder during clashes outside the presidential palace last year, sparked by his temporary claim of extraordinary powers. Fourteen other senior members of his Muslim Brotherhood and his former government are also being tried. Other charges are pending. It is unclear if Morsi will appear in person, or by video link. He has been held in an undisclosed location since he was toppled by the military July 3rd, following mass protests. A member of his legal team has rejected the court's jurisdiction.

Ahmed Abdel Gawad said they did not recognize the legal proceedings. But in conceding the trial would go ahead, he insisted there must be a live, international broadcast of all sessions. In contrast to evidence presented in the trial of Egypt's other ousted president, Hosni Mubarak, political analyst Hisham Kassem thinks the case against Morsi could be strong. "Unlike Mubarak, Morsi did not have the services supporting him when he came under. Again unlike Mubarak he was not very clever about
covering his face and I think he is going to end with enough evidence presented to be there a number of serious cases against him," said Kassem. Tensions are running high as the military-backed government continues its crackdown against Morsi supporters and other Islamists. Human Rights Watch said Saturday that 1,300 people have died in confrontations since July and asked, "What will it take for authorities to rein in security forces?" Most of the anti-interim government protests are peaceful, recently spreading to university campuses. But there are also attacks on security forces, especially in the Sinai peninsula, by militant Islamists. Pro-government media often conflate the protests and attacks as terrorist movements.

With Islamist media largely shut down, most remaining media have adopted a pro-military stance. One of the nation's most popular political satirists, Bassem Youssef, who delighted audiences by poking fun at the Morsi government, was taken off the air Friday after he skewered the current wave of neo-nationalism. One of the few issues most Egyptians can agree on - anti-Americanism - has been highlighted by the visit Sunday of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. Both pro- and anti-military forces feel Washington has not done enough to support their side, and officials have spoken of how they are seeking alliances elsewhere. The U.S. suspended some aid to the new government, but will continue cooperation on counter-terrorism and other key issues, including peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Political analyst Kassem thinks relations will weather the current storm. "I think we are seeing here the reality of the situation which is how deep Egyptian-American relations are and what we see as a crisis is really of face value, but behind closed doors there is a very solid relationship," he said. However, solid international ties may be, new fractures within Egyptian society appear almost daily from a myriad of sources. Nine people were killed in Assiut Saturday - not over politics, but in a dispute sparked by who was first in line to buy bread.

November 3, 2013: Egypt: Location of Mursi's Trial Changed'

ASWAT MASRIYA: The trial of Egyptian deposed President Mohamed Mursi will be held at the Academy of Police on Monday in the outskirts of Cairo, said a judicial source. Mursi's trial was scheduled to be held at a police institute located in South Cairo near the residential district of Maadi. The Islamist president, who was ousted by the military in July 3 following mass protests against his rule, is due to appear in court on charges of inciting violence.
Egypt On High Alert As Morsi Arrives for Trial'

Tunis Afrique Presse (Tunis) Cairo — Egypt's ousted former President Mohammed Morsi has arrived at a courtroom in Cairo where he is due to go on trial, state media say. He and 14 other Muslim Brotherhood figures face charges of inciting the killing of protesters in clashes outside the presidential palace. Supporters of the ousted president had vowed to major protests. Security services are now on high alert. Mr Morsi was ousted by the military in July after protests against his rule.

Supporters of Mursi Head to Trial Scene'

ASWAT MASRIYA: Dozens of supporters of Egyptian ousted President Mohammed Mursi arrived to Cairo Police Academy on Monday morning where he is set to face trial on charges of inciting violence, said a local news portal. “Down with the military rule!” chanted some of the protesters, according to the Shorouk news portal. Mursi, who hails from the Muslim Brotherhood stands trial along with 14 other leading members of the group on accusations of inciting violence against peaceful protesters in presidential palace clashes, which took place in December 2012 and left at least 11 people killed.

Mursi's Trial Postponed to January 8, 2014'

ASWAT MASRIYA: The trial of deposed Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi was postponed to January 8 on Monday, the presiding judge said. Mursi, ousted in July by the military following mass protests against his rule, is being tried over charges of inciting violence. The first session of Mursi's trial was adjourned twice on Monday because of repeated interruptions by him where he maintained that he is the legitimate president of Egypt. "Down with the Military rule," the Islamist president chanted during the trial.

Egypt Prepares for Constitutional Referendum - Minister'

ASWAT ASRIYA: Egypt's Local Development Minister Adel Labib said on Tuesday that all governorates have begun preparing for a referendum on the new constitution amid heavy security measures. Labib added in a press conference on Tuesday that measures to ease the process for voters and avoid manipulation are under consideration. He denied accusations that the government is pushing for a "yes" vote and explained that it merely encourages all eligible voters to participate. Hany Mahmoud,
minister of administrative development, said late on Monday that the constitutional referendum will be held in mid-January. A 50-member assembly finished drafting the constitution last week and presented it to the interim president for ratification.

Egypt: New Anti-Demonstration Law in Egypt Must Be Amended, Urges UN Rights Chief

The United Nations human rights chief today warned that a new law restricting demonstrations in Egypt is seriously flawed and must be amended or repealed. The law, issued on Sunday, gives local security authorities the power to ban gatherings that would, among other things, constitute a threat to "security" or "disrupt citizens' interests" without specifically detailing the conduct. "The fact that the law criminalises acts by demonstrators which may breach 'security and public order,' without clearly defining these terms, leaves the door open to a very restrictive and repressive interpretation," said Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Of particular concern are the provisions on the use of force by law enforcement officials and the excessive sanctions, including massive fines as well as prison sentences, that can be imposed on those found to be in breach of this law," she stressed. The new law prescribes a list of escalating measures that law enforcement authorities can employ, after issuing warnings, to disperse unruly demonstrators. These include tear gas, water cannon, smoke grenades, warning shots, rubber bullets, and even live ammunition which is prohibited by international standards except in unavoidable instances in order to protect lives. "This is a country whose people have proclaimed loudly, clearly, courageously and repeatedly their desire to be able to demonstrate peacefully in accordance with their international human rights," Ms. Pillay said. She added that Egyptian civil society organizations and human rights defenders have raised concerns about the law which have not been taken into account. "There is a real risk that the lives of peaceful protestors will be put at risk because of the violent behaviour of a few, or because the law may too easily be interpreted by local security authorities in a way that permits them to use excessive force in inappropriate circumstances," the High Commissioner said. Among other concerns, she noted that under the new regulation, protest organisers in most cases are bound to give at least three days' notice to the police. The law is also "much too wide-ranging in terms of restricting locations," she said. It has a sweeping ban on public meetings or assembly for political purposes in and around places of worship which number in the tens of thousands in Egypt. The country has been undergoing a democratic transition following the toppling of
President Hosni Mubarak two years ago in the wake of mass protests. This past July, renewed protests, in which dozens of people were killed and wounded, led to the Egyptian military deposing President Mohamed Morsy. The Constitution was then suspended and an interim government set up.

December 5, 2013: CHATHAM HOUSE Analysis - How the Egyptian IB Failed

By Hazem Kandil: Egypt's first freely elected president has been deposed by the army. It's not a question of religion, it's about competence. Supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood claim that it was leading a revolutionary attack on Egypt's authoritarian regime when it was stopped in its tracks over the summer by a counter-revolution. This is fiction. The Brotherhood's ambition was simply to replace the old ruling party at the pinnacle of power. The 2011 uprising had redistributed power within the country's ruling 'power triangle', the uneasy partnership between military, security, and political institutions. The security sector had lost its overriding dominance of the ruling bloc, and was now forced to play second fiddle to the once marginalized military. The political slot was open for negotiations, and the Brotherhood wanted to present itself as the best candidate by appeasing the two custodians of violence. The Brotherhood never hinted at challenging the autonomy and privileges of the armed forces (economic or otherwise), and made sure it stayed on the right side of the military leadership all along. Thanks to the Brotherhood's unconditional support, Egypt's security establishment was not so much as dented during the 2011 revolt. While demonstrators were making their stand against Mubarak in Tahrir Square, Mohamed Morsi, the future President, and Saad al-Katatni, head of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party in parliament, they spared no opportunity to praise Egypt's gallant law enforcers. And when Morsi was elected President, he announced that the Interior Ministry had been rehabilitated and was performing the most patriotic of duties. The president not only dropped a fact-finding commission report detailing abuses, including the shooting of demonstrators, but audaciously congratulated police for their valuable contribution to the 2011 uprising.

Needless to say, security abuses increased substantially in his short tenure, and soon enough official coercion was augmented with Brotherhood militias. This hardly came as a surprise from an organization obsessed with foiling secular conspiracies and policing social piety. But the Brotherhood had moral and practical justifications for sacrificing revolutionaries at the altar. Morally, they felt entitled to rule after eight-
and-a-half decades of political toiling. Most of the movement's leaders saw their best years wasted behind prison bars. Moreover, as the true representatives of Islam, the Brothers believed they were obliged to safeguard the faithful from secularists. On a practical level, the Brotherhood appreciated the difficulty of confronting the security forces. Although uniting the revolutionary camp under its banner would have offered it a fighting chance, the Brotherhood did not have the stomach for that. As it turned out, deferring to the military and security was not enough to consolidate power. The army, in particular, needed to relieve itself of the burden of domestic rule to focus on some of the more pressing geopolitical issues: rebuilding its capacity as a combat force, diversifying its weapon sources beyond the US, reversing the demilitarization of Sinai and pursuing means of projecting regional power. The Brotherhood was thus expected to stabilize the political arena, but they failed to deliver because of their ineptitude at political bargaining.

It was clear that none of the three political contenders (Islamists, old regime loyalists, and civil activists) was strong enough to rule alone. Alliances were necessary. Instead of siding with either old regime or revolutionary forces, the Brothers tried to play them off against each other to buy time. Old regime politicians suspected that despite their sugar-coated promises, the Brothers were not willing to share the spoils of Egypt's patronage state. And civil activists resented the Brotherhood's hijacking of their revolt. Unfortunately, the Islamists failed to appreciate that their intransigence would drive their political rivals into a tactical alliance against them, and that such an alliance was bound to force officers to revise their stance. That being said, the Brotherhood's opponents could not have fielded enough protesters to secure the cooperation of the high command had the common folk abstained. It was the Brotherhood's shocking incompetence at government that drove millions into the streets on June 30. And it was the Brotherhood's decision to turn a political clash into a religious war that guaranteed the public's blanket endorsement for brutally repressing them. The Brothers were ousted not because of their political duplicity, but because they were so bad at it. And they were later hunted down because they never understood that their compatriots preferred to risk backtracking into a functioning secular authoritarianism to the certainty of sliding into incompetent religious fascism. Dr Hazem Kandil is a lecturer in sociology and fellow of St Catharine's College, Cambridge, and author of 'Inside the Brotherhood' (Polity, 2014)
December 17, 2013: In Egypt a court found two sons of former dictator Hosni Mubarak not guilty of corruption. The courts have found innocent most Mubarak officials charged with corruption. The courts are considered corrupt as well and these acquittals are widely unpopular. Many Egyptians feared this would happen after the 2011 election because so many Mubarak supporters are major land owners and businessmen.

December 22, 2013: In Egypt (Mansoura) an Islamic terrorist bomb killed 16 and wounded over 130. The Moslem Brotherhood was blamed, even though another Islamic terrorist group took responsibility.

In Egypt the government declared the Moslem Brotherhood a terrorist organization and police began shutting down Brotherhood facilities and arresting members.

December 25, 2013: Egypt Govt Officially Announces Muslim Brotherhood As Terrorist Organisation’ ASWAT MASRIYA, Cairo — The Egyptian government officially announced the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation on Wednesday. Egypt has formally designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group on Wednesday, said Hossam Eissa, deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Higher Education. The announcement comes a day after a car bomb exploded at a police station in Nile Delta's Mansoura, leaving 16 dead and scores injured. This step allows the government to charge whoever is part of the Brotherhood or promotes or funds it in any way with membership of a terrorist group, a cabinet statement said. Arab countries that signed the 1998 Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism will be notified with this decision. The Mansoura blast is "a serious escalation for the Brotherhood's violence against Egypt and Egyptians. On the other hand, the Brotherhood condemned the bombing, describing it as an attempt to stir civil war in the country. The Brotherhood also hinted at the state's involvement in the blast. In an online statement, the hardline Sinai-based Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis group has taken responsibility for the attack which is considered one of the deadliest since Islamist President Mohamed Mursi was deposed last July. The authenticity of the statement has not been confirmed.

December 26, 2013: Egypt: Hardline Islamist Group IB Says Govt Decision Opens Door to Violence’ ASWAT MASRIYA: Cairo — A hardline Egyptian Islamist group said that the government's decision to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group is unjust and opens the door to violence in a statement issued Thursday. The Islamist group al-Gamaa al-Islamiya, which backs deposed President Mohamed Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood, was an armed group involved in violent attacks
against tourists and Christians in the nineties. The group has later given up violence. "This decision eliminates any remaining chance at settling the political crisis in Egypt," the Islamist group warned. The government's decision came one day after a blast at a security building in Nile Delta's Mansoura, northeast to Cairo, which left 16 people killed and over 100 injured. Al-Gamaa al-Islamiya said that the decision came despite that another group, Sinai-based militant Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, took responsibility for the attack. The group described the decision as one that feeds retaliation against the Islamist movement and an exculsion of it, which would lead to more division and polarisation. "It demonstrates the failure of the Coup's government to administrate the country and protect it, as it only resolves the political crisis through oppressive security methods."

December 28, 2013: In Egypt (Cairo) continuing anti-government violence at the Al Azhar University (the oldest in the Moslem world) has left three students dead and nearly a hundred arrested. These actions were all part of the increased number of demonstrations protesting the government designating the Moslem Brotherhood a terrorist organization. This has led to the arrest of about 200 protestors throughout Egypt.

In Egypt police arrested four al Jazeera reporters and accused them of working with Islamic terrorist groups. Two of the reporters were foreigners (Canadian and Australian).

In Egypt (north of Cairo) a bomb went off outside an army compound and wounded four soldiers.

In Egypt (Sinai) terrorists blew up a portion of a natural gas pipeline supplying local factories.

In Egypt the government froze the assets of 572 Moslem Brotherhood leaders. In addition 87 private schools affiliated with the Brotherhood were taken over by the government. The government has also created a list of 1,055 NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations like charities and aid groups) that are part of or associated with the Brotherhood and froze their assets as well.

In Egypt (Cairo) police found a terrorist bomb and disabled it. Elsewhere (Sinai) police killed an Islamic terrorist as he was planting a bomb. Another 13 Islamic terrorist suspects were arrested in Sinai. Egyptian police also found and closed five more smuggling tunnels into Gaza.
Increasingly the pro-Morsi demonstrators are set upon by crowds of locals who do not want roads blocked and commerce interfered with by the demonstrators. Thousands of Brotherhood members and supporters have been arrested, but many Egyptians continue to believe that a religious dictatorship is the only way to solve the corruption and inept governance that have crippled Egypt for centuries.

Egypt Goes To War With The Moslem Brotherhood’

Updates: The recent Egyptian decision to declare the Moslem Brotherhood a terrorist organization has caused more demonstrations and terror attacks. The Brotherhood renounced terrorist violence back in the 1970s but a Brotherhood faction went rogue in the 1990s and took part in a major terrorist campaign against the government and foreign tourists. The attack on foreigners and Egyptian civilians led to the defeat of the Islamic terrorists and Brotherhood promises to behave. The Brotherhood condemned the recent terror attacks by groups in the Sinai. These have killed over a hundred soldiers and police. The Brotherhood condemns all violence, but now it’s the 1990s all over again with some Brotherhood members getting involved with Islamic terrorists. Many Brotherhood members are very angry at government efforts to prosecute their leader Mohamed Morsi, despite the fact that Morsi was elected president in mid-2012. The majority of Egyptians are anti-Morsi but many of those who still back Morsi are willing to use violence to try and get Morsi back in power. Israel wants things to quiet down in Egypt, as long as the place does not turn into a Islamic terrorist sanctuary.

December 29, 2013: Egypt Will Never Give Up One Drop of Its Nile Water Quota – Minister’

Egypt State Information Service (Cairo): Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources Mohamed Abdel-Motleb disclosed that consultations are currently being underway with the Sudanese and Ethiopian counterparts to render successful the forthcoming ministerial meeting to be held Khartoum during the first week of January 2014. The meeting will probe an appropriate mechanism for pursuing the technical studies required from the Ethiopian part as well as assigning an international consultative bureau to perform them, said the Minister.

Such studies will deal with the technical details of the Renaissance Dam’s storage bases, storage phases and mechanism of operations all year round, he added. The minister went on to say that Egyptian State is dealing seriously with the Renaissance Dam crisis in cooperation with the
Nile basin states, noting that the meetings of the Supreme Committee for Nile Water have resulted in promoting ties with the Ethiopian side. He added that Egypt will never give up one drop of its Nile water quota, highlighting that all parties concerned should work on reaching an agreement that serves the interest of all Nile riparian countries through a comprehensive development. He affirmed that the River Congo project would not affect the Egyptian share of water that comes from the Blue Nile.

January 27, 2014: Most Egyptians now feel like the Saudis. Egyptians don’t mind an “Islamic” government, but they resent having archaic lifestyle rules forced on them, or Moslem Brotherhood zealots talking about how maybe democracy isn’t really Islamic. Because of that the Moslem Brotherhood is in big trouble this time because so many Egyptians are hostile to Moslem Brotherhood members and, unlike in the past, have cell phones with which to quickly tell the police what the local Islamic zealots are up to.

The Egyptians brain trust that holds most of the senior jobs at al Qaeda Center are ever mindful of how the Moslem Brotherhood was defeated in Egypt during the 1990s. It was because too many civilians died during terrorist attacks. These Egyptians also remember how the Moslem Brotherhood was crushed partly because of the many factions within it. Some of the factions eventually made deals with the government, went legit, and sold out the more radical brothers. That has not changed either.

In the 1990s the Egyptian government defeated the Moslem Brotherhood and many survivors fled Egypt and some helped found al Qaeda. Algeria finally defeated a similar movement by 2004. Syria crushed the Moslem Brotherhood in the early 1980s, after five years of violence. The Moslem Brotherhood is not invincible, but it is persistent.

It was long believed by many in the West that the Moslem Brotherhood was one form of Islamic radicalism that seemed moderate enough, and international enough, to allow for widespread use in democracies. For many members of the Moslem Brotherhood that is true. Unfortunately the brotherhood has many factions and some of them are very radical and just barely tolerant of democracy. Worse yet, the first national election the Moslem Brotherhood has won was in Egypt and the moderates and radicals in the Brotherhood subsequently spent more time arguing with each other than in dealing with problems most Egyptians were concerned about (corruption and the economy).
This is ironic because Saudi Arabia has long supported Islamic conservative groups. Yet the Saudis came out against the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt in 2013 and against al Qaeda in the 1980s. At the same time the Saudis have no problem supporting Islamic radicals in Syria, including some who belong to al Qaeda. What is going on here? It’s simple. The Saud family has always supported Islamic radicals, but only those who agreed that the Saud family should be in charge (of Saudi Arabia and as a leader of the Islamic world). Islamic radicals that changed their minds about this arrangement were crushed. Thus the Saudis supported al Qaeda until al Qaeda decided that the Saudis were not Islamic enough to be in charge. That led to a dispute in the 1990s that escalated in 2003 and, so far, the Saudis are winning. The Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt has always been hostile to the Saudis and that has been reciprocated. This was made worse by the fact that the current head of al Qaeda was once a leader in the Egyptian Moslem Brotherhood.

The Egyptian Moslem Brotherhood was deposed by the July 2013 coup in part because it did not have the support of Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich Gulf states. This is sad, because the Moslem Brotherhood was given shelter in Saudi Arabia when it was driven from Egypt (for trying to overthrow the secular government) in the 1960s. But once in Saudi Arabia the Moslem Brotherhood began plotting to overthrow the Saudi monarchy because it was not Islamic enough. That ended badly and most Saudis have not forgotten. Although the Saudis initially supported the new Moslem Brotherhood government with massive loans and grants, that soon changed when the Brotherhood got cozy with Iran. That offended most Egyptians as well as most people in Arabia. When the Moslem Brotherhood began acting like it did while in exile in Saudi Arabia half a century ago the Saudis concluded that the Moslem Brotherhood had not really changed.

Thus the Moslem Brotherhood failed once more to create an Islamic Egypt that the movements’ founders began working towards back in the 1920s. The basic idea behind the Moslem Brotherhood, to use Islamic law to form an Egyptian free of corruption and oppression, has always appealed to many Egyptians (rich and poor) who were fed up with the sorry state of Egyptian culture.

In Egypt the Moslem Brotherhood is again fighting to survive. After forming a government they dominated in 2012, the Moslem Brotherhood proceeded to turn most Egyptians against them because the Moslem
Brotherhood leadership paid too little attention to making Egypt work and too much attention to Moslem Brotherhood politics.

January 27, 2013: Egypt's Al-Sisi given okay for presidential run’

News updates: State Media says top generals have given green light to Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who led the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi. The official state news agency has said Egypt's top generals have endorsed a presidential run by the army chief who led the toppling of the former president Mohamed Morsi last summer.

MENA on Monday said an official announcement by Sissi of his candidacy could take place "within hours," after the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces "unanimously delegated" him to run in presidential elections during an hours-long meeting Monday. The announcement was made shortly after interim President Adely Mansour promoted el-Sissi to field marshal, the military's highest rank, apparently as an honour before he steps down from the military as required for him to run.

Presidential elections are due to take place by end of April. El-Sisi, who toppled Islamist president Mohamed Morsi last year, is widely expected to contest the election due within six months, and win easily. Sisi has become hugely popular since the military takeover, with supporters viewing him as a decisive figure who can tackle unrest that has gripped Egypt since the 2011 uprising that brought down Hosni Mubarak's regime.

February 10, 2014: In Egypt (Sinai) terrorists blew up a portion of a natural gas pipeline. This is the fourth such attack in 2014.

February 13, 2014: After a week-long Egyptian offensive against Islamic terrorists in the Sinai Peninsula the army claimed 112 Islamic terrorists killed or wounded and 69 arrested.

February 16, 2014: In the Sinai, near the Israeli border a bomb hit a tourist bus killing three South Korean tourists and the Egyptian driver.

February 18, 2014: Egypt charged two Israelis and two Egyptians with spying inside Egypt. The two Egyptians were arrested but the Israelis were apparently back in Israel.

Egyptian Islamic terrorists warned foreign tourists to stay out of Egypt. For older Egyptians this is all too familiar. Although the Moslem Brotherhood renounced terrorist violence back in the 1970s, a Brotherhood faction went rogue in the 1990s and took part in a major
terrorist campaign against the government and foreign tourists. The attack on foreigners and Egyptian civilians led to a major backlash from Egyptians in general the quick defeat of the Islamic terrorists. After that the Moslem Brotherhood promised to behave and was allowed to continue operating openly. Until recently the Brotherhood condemned the terror attacks by groups in the Sinai. These have left hundreds of Islamic terrorists, civilians, soldiers and police dead in the last year. The Brotherhood has long condemned all violence, but now it’s the 1990s all over again with some Brotherhood members getting involved with Islamic terrorists. Brotherhood members are increasingly angry at government efforts to prosecute their leader Mohamed Morsi, despite the fact that Morsi was elected president in mid-2012. The majority of Egyptians are anti-Morsi but many of those who still back Morsi are willing to use violence to try and get Morsi back in power. Israel wants things to quiet down in Egypt, as long as the place does not turn into an Islamic terrorist sanctuary.

Egypt revealed that its AH-64 Apache helicopter gunships had recently fired 24 Hellfire missiles at Islamic terrorists in the Sinai. According to the 1979 peace deal with Israel Egypt is not allowed to operate any of its 35 AH-64s in Sinai but in 2012 Israel agreed to allow Egypt to operate AH-64s in Sinai against Islamic terrorists. Israel also operates 44 AH-64s and uses them frequently and successfully against Islamic terrorists.

In the Sinai Egyptian over a hundred police and soldiers have been killed fighting Islamic terrorists so far this year. Since 2011 over 450 policemen have been killed by Islamic terrorists in Egypt, most of them in Sinai. The police are taking more casualties than the army, which is only really active in Sinai.

March 24, 2014: Egypt court sentences 528 Morsi supporters to death’

They were convicted of charges including murdering a policeman and attacks on people and property. The group of 528 is among over 1,200 supporters of Mr Morsi on trial, including senior Brotherhood members. Authorities have cracked down harshly on Islamists since Mr. Morsi was removed by the military in July, 2013.

Egypt court sentences 528 Morsi supporters to death’

BBC News updates: A court in Egypt has sentenced 528 supporters of ousted Islamist President Mohammed Morsi to death. They were convicted of charges including murdering a policeman and attacks on people and
The group is among some 1,200 Muslim Brotherhood supporters on trial, including senior members. Authorities have cracked down harshly on Islamists since Mr Morsi was removed by the military in July. Hundreds have been killed and thousands arrested.

They are expected to appeal. The verdict now goes to Egypt's supreme religious authority, the Grand Mufti (a senior Islamic scholar), for approval or rejection. Campaigners say that while death sentences are often handed down in Egypt, few have been carried out in recent years. The final trial session will not be held until 28 April, so there is some time left before the sentence is confirmed and there will be time to appeal in that period, says the BBC's Orla Guerin in Cairo. The Muslim Brotherhood has denounced death sentences and Washington expressed shock and concern.

In absentia: The court in Minya, south of the capital, Cairo, issued its ruling after only two sessions in which the defendants' lawyers complained they had no chance to present their case. Lawyers have accused the presiding judge of "veering away from all legal norms" and denying justice to the accused, our correspondent adds. They were convicted, among other charges, of the murder of the deputy commander of the Matay district police station in Minya. Some 147 suspects were in court for the trial - the others were convicted in absentia, reports say. The court also acquitted 16 other defendants.

There was shock at the verdict, BBC's Orla Guerin reports.

The attacks took place in August after security forces broke up two camps of pro-Morsi supporters in Cairo, killing hundreds of people.

Mr Morsi was ousted by the military last July following mass street protests against his government. He is facing four separate trials.

There has since been a severe crackdown on his Muslim Brotherhood group, as well as on other activists seen as hostile to the military-backed interim government.

The Brotherhood has been declared a terrorist organisation and authorities have punished any public show of support for it. A second group of 700 Morsi supporters is due to go on trial on Tuesday.

Dictatorship: The Muslim Brotherhood's spokesman in London, Abdullah el-Haddad, told the BBC the sentences showed that Egypt was now a dictatorship.
"It may be just a threat message and there will be appeals to the court and the decision of the court will change, but this is the new Egypt after the coup. This is the new dictatorship that [army chief and defence minister Field Marshal] Abdul Fattah al-Sisi is trying to establish."

Mr Haddad said the Muslim Brotherhood's general guide Mohammed Badie was among those convicted, though other reports say Mr Badie is only due in court on Tuesday.

The US government also questioned how the defendants could have had a fair trial in just two court sessions - one of which was Monday's sentencing.

"It sort of defies logic," said Marie Harf, deputy US State Department spokeswoman, adding that Washington was "deeply concerned" and "shocked".

"Obviously the defendants can appeal, but it simply does not seem possible that a fair review of evidence and testimony consistent with international standards could be accomplished with over 529 defendants in a two-day trial," she said.

Defence counsel Mohamed Tousson claimed the judge rushed to sentencing after being angered by a lawyer's request for his recusal at Saturday's opening hearing.

"He got very angry, and adjourned the trial for sentencing," Mr Tousson said, adding "It's a huge violation of defendants' rights."

Egypt's foreign ministry defended the court's handling of the trial, saying the sentences had been "issued by an independent court after careful study of the case". (Text ends)

Egypt military chief Abdul Fattah al-Sisi resigns’

BBC News: (March 26, 2014)

Field Marshal Abdul Fattah al-Sisi has announced that he has resigned as Egypt's military chief in order to stand for the presidency. Al-Sisi born in Cairo on 19 November 1954

Field Marshal Al-Sisi’s Rise through the ranks

Graduated from Egypt's Military Academy in 1977
Further training in UK and US

Youngest member of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces after 2011 uprising topples Hosni Mubarak

Appointed commander-in-chief of armed forces and defence minister in 2012 by President Mohammed Morsi

Overthrows Mr Morsi, suspends constitution and installs interim government in 2013 following mass opposition protests

Promoted to field marshal in January 2014

He made the widely expected announcement on state television. Mr Sisi led the overthrow of President Mohammed Morsi in July following mass opposition protests. Correspondents say he is likely to win the presidential poll, given his popularity and the lack of any serious rivals.

In his address, Mr Sisi told Egyptians he was "appearing in front of you for the last time in military uniform", before warning that the country was "threatened by terrorists" and saying he would work to make an Egypt "free of fear".

He also promised to tackle the country's growing economic problems, but said he could not "perform miracles" and called on Egyptians to work hard to improve their country.

Mr Sisi, 59, who said he first wore military uniform as a 15-year-old cadet in 1970, said he had "humbly" decided to bow to the will of the people.

Sounding a similar note earlier this month, he was quoted by state media saying he could "not turn his back on calls by the majority of Egyptians" for him to run for president.

To his supporters, the former army chief is a saviour who can end the political turmoil dogging Egypt since a popular uprising ended Hosni Mubarak’s three decades of one-man rule in 2011.

Tens of thousands of his supporters have taken to the streets to urge him to stand.

But his opponents hold him responsible for what human rights groups say are widespread abuses, and fear that he wants a return to authoritarianism.
His announcement came hours after Egypt's interim authorities ordered the prosecution of 919 suspected Islamists and days after 528 Islamists were sentenced to death in a separate case.

If Abdul Fattah al-Sisi becomes president, he will be the latest in a line of Egyptian rulers drawn from the military: a line only briefly broken during Islamist President Mohamed Morsi's year in office.

The starting date of the nomination process for the presidential election will reportedly be announced on Sunday, after which no changes may be made to the electoral roll.

The government has yet to set a date for the vote, although earlier this month al-Ahram newspaper cited interim President Adly Mansour as saying that it would be completed by 17 July.

Leftist politician Hamdeen Sabahi, who came third in the 2012 election, is the only other candidate to have declared his intention to run.

Gen Sedki Sobhi, the current chief-of-staff of the armed forces, is expected to be named the new commander-in-chief and defence minister.

Russia launches a spy satellite for Egyptian military’

By Russian Space Web (April 22, 2014) With the exception of Russian Space Web, other news sites failed to report that the spy satellite Russia launched for Egypt on April 16 was first and foremost designed to boost the power of Egypt's military. Given Egypt has been threatening Ethiopia with war over the ongoing contruction of the Dam over Blue Nile, the launch of a spy satellite perhaps capable of being used as an orbital weapon should be a source of serious concern for Ethiopia.

A Russian rocket launched a new-generation surveillance spacecraft Wednesday designed to give the Egyptian military a powerful "eye in the sky." The launch of the Soyuz-U rocket took place as scheduled on April 16, 2014, at 20:20 Moscow Time (12: 20 EST) from Site 31 in the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. The launch vehicle was carrying a Russian-built Egyptsat-2 satellite designed to provide high-resolution imagery for the Egyptian military and other government agencies in the country. The spacecraft was successfully delivered into its planned orbit 520 seconds after liftoff.
The development and launch campaign for Egyptsat-2 has been conducted largely in secret. Only one visual of the operational spacecraft was released to the public by its manufacturer RKK Energia after the successful launch. Notably, in its post-launch press-release, the company avoided the use of name Egyptsat-2, instead identifying the satellite as a "spacecraft for optical-electronic observation developed for the foreign customer."

RKK Energia announced that the satellite had been inserted into a 720 by 440-kilometer orbit with an inclination 51.6 degrees toward the Equator. Its ground facility established control over the satellite at 21:52 Moscow Time, the company said. Western radar detected two objects in orbit with similar parameters, probably representing the satellite and the third stage of the Soyuz-U launch vehicle. The satellite was expected to use its own propulsion system to enter a final operational orbit.

PRESS: At least 70 journalists killed around the world in 2013’

Figures compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists show that 29 journalists were killed in Syria, 10 in Iraq and six in Egypt

CPJ (AP) April 25, 2014 At least 70 journalists were killed around the world in 2013, including 29 who died covering the civil war in Syria and 10 in Iraq, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The dead in Syria included a number of citizen journalists working to document combat in their home cities, broadcasters who worked with media outlets affiliated with either the government or the opposition, and a handful of correspondents for the foreign press, including an al-Jazeera reporter, Mohamed al-Mesalma, who was shot by a sniper.

Six journalists died in Egypt. Half of those reporters were killed while reporting a 14 August crackdown by Egyptian security forces on demonstrators protesting the ousting of Mohamed Morsi. "The Middle East has become a killing field for journalists. While the number of journalists killed for their work has declined in some places, the civil war in Syria and a renewal of sectarian attacks in Iraq have taken an agonising toll," the committee's deputy director, Robert Mahoney, said in a statement.

"The international community must prevail on all governments and armed groups to respect the civilian status of reporters and to prosecute the killers of journalists." The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists has been tracking deaths among reporters and broadcasters since 1992. Most of the killings it has documented over the years involve
Reporters and commentators who covered police misconduct, political corruption or drug trafficking and other sensitive topics were slain in separate incidents in Brazil, Colombia, the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Russia. A pair of Radio France Internationale journalists were abducted and killed after meeting a leader of ethnic Tuareg separatists in Kidal, Mali. Militants in Iraq killed five members of the news staff of Salaheddin TV in a suicide attack this month on the channel's offices in Tikrit, Iraq.

For the first time in a decade, no journalists were known to have been killed for their work in Mexico. The CPJ is still looking into the deaths of an additional 25 journalists in 2013, not included in the tally of 70, to determine whether their deaths had anything to do with their work. To date, at least 63 journalists have been killed covering the conflict in Syria, the CPJ's report said – and that tally may understate the problem. Sixty journalists have been abducted in Syria this year alone. Thirty are still missing.

April 28, 2014: Egypt: Brotherhood's chief mass death sentences’

News A judge at a mass trial in Egypt has recommended the death penalty for 683 people - including Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammed Badie. The defendants faced charges over an attack on a police station in Minya in 2013 in which a policeman was killed. However, the judge also commuted to life terms 492 death sentences out of 529 passed in March in a separate case. Also on Monday, a court banned a youth group that helped ignite the uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak in 2011. The decision passed in Cairo to outlaw the April 6 pro-democracy movement was based on a complaint that accused the group of "tarnishing the image" of Egypt and colluding with foreign parties. Ahmed Maher, the group's leader, was sentenced to three years in prison in December for violating a law that bans all but police-sanctioned protests.

Egypt unfair trial, death sentences make mockery of justice -AI’

PR (April 28, 2014) - Amnesty International today warned of grave flaws in Egypt's criminal justice system after a court in El Minya, Upper Egypt, confirmed death sentences for 37 people and imposed terms of life
imprisonment to 491 in one case, and ruled that 683 individuals should be sentenced to death in another.

“Today’s decisions once again expose how arbitrary and selective Egypt’s criminal justice system has become. The court has displayed a complete contempt for the most basic principles of a fair trial and has utterly destroyed its credibility. It is time for Egypt’s authorities to come clean and acknowledge that the current system is neither fair nor independent or impartial,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International.

“Egypt’s judiciary risks becoming just another part of the authorities’ repressive machinery, issuing sentences of death and life imprisonment on an industrial scale.” “The verdict must not be allowed to stand – the convictions of the 37 sentenced to death and 491 sentenced to life in prison must be quashed and fair retrials with no possibility of the death penalty must be ordered immediately for all the defendants.”

All 528 defendants were facing charges in connection with an attack on a police station in August 2013 and belonging to the banned Muslim Brotherhood movement. The verdicts in their cases come after a grossly unfair trial in which the judge did not review evidence or allow the defence to cross-examine witnesses. Defence lawyers and defendants alike were barred from the previous session on 24 March, in which the court indicated it would sentence all 528 to death.

Today, the same court also referred 683 defendants, including Mohamed Badie, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, in a separate case involving political violence to Egypt’s Grand Mufti – who under Egyptian law must review all death sentences before the court formally imposes them. They were accused of murder, attempted murder, burning Adwa Police Station, belonging to a banned group and participating in a gathering of more than five persons with the intention of committing the above mentioned crimes. This trial also was fundamentally unfair, as reported by an Amnesty International delegate who attended the trial. AI opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and considers it to be the ultimate cruel, degrading and inhuman punishment. None of the defendants in either case was brought to court.

May 6, 2014: Egypt’s el-Sissi: Muslim Brotherhood will not return’

By SARAH EL DEEEB and LEE KEATH, AP
CAIRO (AP) — Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, the former military chief who removed Egypt's Islamist president and who is now poised to win the post in elections this month, said the Muslim Brotherhood will never return as an organization, accusing it of using militant groups as cover to destabilize the country. El-Sissi spoke in the first TV interview of his campaign, aired Monday, vowing that restoring stability and bringing development were his priorities. The comments were a seemingly unequivocal rejection of any political reconciliation with the Brotherhood, which was Egypt's most powerful political force until el-Sissi removed President Mohammed Morsi, a member of the group, last summer.

Since ousting Morsi, el-Sissi has been riding an overwhelming media frenzy lauding him as Egypt's savior, and his status as the country's strongest figure all but guarantees him a victory in the May 26-27 election. El-Sissi's only opponent in the race is leftist politician Hamdeen Sabahi, the third-place finisher in the 2012 election won by Morsi. El-Sissi's comments were a stark signal of his intention to ensure the elimination of the 86-year-old Brotherhood as both a political and ideological force in the country. He is building on an unprecedented popular resentment of the group, after its rise to power in the last three years. Asked whether the Brotherhood will no longer exist under his presidency, el-Sissi replied, "Yes. Just like that."

"It's not me that finished it, the Egyptians have. The problem is not with me," he said. The Brotherhood and its Islamist allies won every election following the 2011 ouster of autocrat Hosni Mubarak, dominating the parliament and capturing the presidency under Morsi. The Brotherhood's electoral strength was largely rooted in a widespread grassroots organization it had built up for decades despite being banned under Mubarak. But after a year in office, millions joined protests demanding Morsi's removal, accusing his Brotherhood of monopolizing power and seeking to change the country's identity along the lines of Brotherhood ideology — prompting el-Sissi's ouster of Morsi. Since then, there's been no sign of reconciliation between the sides. The Brotherhood and its allies have denounced Morsi's removal as a military coup that has wrecked democracy, rejecting the new government and persisting in a campaign of street protests.

Security forces have waged a ferocious crackdown on Morsi supporters, clashing with protesters. Hundreds have been killed and more than 16,000 members of the Brotherhood and other Islamists have been arrested. The Brotherhood's leader, Mohammed Badie, has been sentenced to death —
though the sentence can be appealed — and he and Morsi and other senior Brotherhood figures face a string of trials. The government has branded the Brotherhood a terrorist organization. Under the weight of the crackdown, protests have waned. At the same time, Islamic militant groups have stepped up bombings and shootings against police and the military in retaliation for Morsi’s removal. In the joint interview with two private Egyptian TV stations CBC and ONTV, el-Sissi directly accused the Brotherhood of being behind the campaign of bombings and shootings. He said the movement "created" Islamic militant groups to use as "covers to fight from behind ... to keep the movement away from any accusations." He said a senior Brotherhood leader had warned him that if he removed Morsi, extremist fighters from Afghanistan and elsewhere would come to Egypt to fight.

The Brotherhood denies any connection to militants. He said the Brotherhood’s ideology was based on "arrogance in religion" — and the presence of that strain of thought had destabilized Egyptian society for decades. "The thought structure of these groups says that we are not true Muslims, and they believed conflict was inevitable because they consider us non-believers," he said. "It will not work for there to be such thinking again." He appealed to the public to support the police and the armed forces in their fight against terrorism. He vowed to respond to demands by the police to boost their capabilities to fight violence and said the armed forces are poised to help the police in such a task.

The 59-year-old el-Sissi retired from the military in March with the rank of field marshal to launch his candidacy. The one-hour interview was his first direct address to the public since he declared his intention to run and after the start of the official campaigning on May 2. His election campaign is likely to largely be made up of TV and media interviews and private meetings, with few street appearances, mainly because of security concerns. In the interview, he said two assassination plots against him have already been uncovered, without giving details. A second part of the interview, likely to go into more details about his economic program, is to be aired on Tuesday.

El-Sissi’s candidacy has also raised concerns among some secular activists over a return of the autocracy that reigned in Egypt under Mubarak, who was also a veteran of the military. A number of prominent secular activists have been arrested in recent months, several of them under a draconian new law banning all protests without a police permit. El-Sissi defended the protest law, saying it was needed to prevent further instability and
insisting that police will give permits to those who seek to hold peaceful demonstrations. "We are talking about a country going to waste. People must realize this and support us. Whoever imagines otherwise, only wants to sabotage Egypt and this won't be allowed," he said, losing his temper for the first time during the interview. "This chaos will bring it down, because of this irresponsible protesting," he said.

El-Sissi spent a part of the interview discussing his family, explaining that he met his wife as a teenager and promised her marriage when he was admitted to military college. He spoke fondly of her as a major supporter of his decision to run for president. She told him he had no choice, he said, telling him, "We of course love you, but this nation will be lost." He revealed that his two of his sons work in the government, one as a member of the General intelligence and another in the powerful Administrative Oversight agency, a government monitoring organization. A third son applied to the foreign service and was twice rejected, he said. He also has a daughter. U.S. trained el-Sissi said the military will not play a role in politics under his presidency and promised to consult with political factions. Asked if he will accept criticism, he responded with a smile, "I will put up with it" — but then said he won't accept "offenses."

In one Cairo neighborhood, Sayeda Zeinab, el-Sissi supporters organized showings of the interview at local coffee houses, where dozens gathered to watch. During advertising breaks, they sang and clapped to pro-military anthems. "After God, I worship him," 65-year-old Alia el-Sayed Saad said, raising two pictures of el-Sissi. "We are not ignorant, we can differentiate between the wicked and the honest." Turnout at the café shows was not high however — and nearby coffee shops with TVs showing a soccer game were packed with larger crowds. (Text ends)

**EGYPT - New cabinet sworn in: Who’s who in El-Sisi’s new cabinet’**

Ahram Online (June 17, 2014)

This is Egypt’s third cabinet since Morsi’s ouster nearly a year ago and the first under new president El-Sisi. The first cabinet under Egypt’s new President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi was sworn in on Tuesday morning, headed by Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahlab. The new government — the third since the ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July of last year — retains 21 existing ministers, one of whom will hold a new portfolio, and introduces 13 new ones. Headed by the president and the premier, the cabinet held its first meeting immediately after taking oath.
Ministers who will remain in their posts are:

1. Minister of Tourism – Hisham Zaazou

Zaazou, 59, continues in his post as tourism minister.

He is a political independent who was appointed tourism minister in August 2012. He was previously assistant to former tourism minister Mounir Fakhry Abdel-Nour.

Zaazou resigned in June when a member of militant Islamist group Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya was appointed governor of Luxor. He later withdrew his resignation and continued as minister after the governor resigned.

2. Minister of Communication – Atef Helmy

Helmy was originally appointed communications minister in January 2013. He resigned from the cabinet on 1 July in protest at then-president Mohamed Morsi’s failure to respond to nationwide protests against his rule. A graduate of a military technical college, Helmy obtained a diploma in computer science from Ain Shams University in 1979. After leaving the army in 1983, he began his career in the civilian IT sector, working at several Egyptian and multinational corporations, including Oracle Egypt, where he became managing director.

3. Minister of Industry – Mounir Fakhry Abdel-Nour

The 68-year-old served as tourism minister from February 2011 until August 2012 under Essam Sharaf.

Abdel-Nour claims to have refused a ministerial position under Mohamed Morsi. As secretary-general of the Wafd Party, he was the first minister from an opposition party to hold a cabinet post for 30 years. He is also the founder of the Egyptian Finance Company and was a member of the National Council for Human Rights. He is a director of the Egyptian Federation of Industries and the Egyptian Competition Authority.

4. Minister of Planning – Ashraf El-Araby

El-Araby served as planning minister from August 2012 until May 2013 under prime minister Hisham Qandil. He was replaced by Muslim Brotherhood figure Amr Darrag. An economist by training, El-Araby received his doctorate from Kansas State University in the United States. For the majority of his career, he worked at the country’s National Planning Institute. From 2006 until the end of 2011, he headed the
technical advisory office of former planning minister Fayza Abul-Naga. After a brief interlude, during which he worked at the Arab Planning Institute in Kuwait, El-Arabi was called back to head the ministry. He was a key part of the Egyptian team negotiating with the International Monetary Fund over a $4.8 billion loan.

5. Minister of Petroleum – Sherif Ismail

Ismail is chairman of the state-owned Ganoub El-Wadi Petroleum Holding Company which manages exploration and production concessions, establishes joint ventures with private companies and constructs oil infrastructure.

6. Minister of Religious Endowments – Mokhtar Gomaa

Gomaa is dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies at Al-Azhar University and a member Al-Azhar’s senior clerical institute. He was born in 1939 in Qalioubiya governorate. He earned his degree in Arabic in 1965 and later completed a master’s degree and a doctorate. Gomaa worked at several newspapers as an Arabic proof-reader and has been a member of the Journalists’ Syndicate since 1972. He is also the author of several books on religion.

7. Minister of Education – Mahmoud Abou El-Nasr

Abul-Nasr was formerly head of the ministry’s technical education sector. He was a faculty member at Cairo University’s mechanical engineering department.

8. Minister of Sports and Youth – Khaled Abdel-Aziz

Abdel-Aziz was the head of the Shooting Club, a private sports club in Giza, and then became chairman of the National Council of Youth. He is a member of the Egypt Party, founded and led by moderate Islamic preacher Amr Khaled. Abdel-Aziz was director of the 2006 African Cup of Nations, which Egypt hosted and won.

9. Minister of Military Production – Ibrahim Younis

Younis is a major general in the army and chairman of the Arab Organisation for Industrialisation (AOI), a military-owned company considered one of the largest industrial organisations in Egypt. The AOI supreme committee is headed by the country’s president and includes several other cabinet ministers.
10. Minister of Health – Adel El-Adawy

El-Adawy served as an assistant to two former ministers of health, Ashraf Hatem and Amr Helmy.

He is also vice president of Banha University with responsibility for graduate studies and research, as well as the head of the Egyptian Society of Orthopaedics.

11. Minister of Housing – Mostafa Madbouly

Madbouly is retaining his position from the previous cabinet as he took up the position of minister of housing in February succeeding Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahleb. He is an architect and urban designer who was director of the UN’s HABITAT Regional Office for Arab States. Madbouly holds a PhD in urban planning from Cairo University and a postgraduate diploma in urban management from the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies in Rotterdam. He served as chairman of the General Organisation of Physical Planning for almost four years.

12. Minister of Supply – Khaled Hanafy

Hanafy is chair of the Internal Trade Development Authority (ITDA), a governmental body belonging to the ministry of supply. He was appointed chair of ITDA after a decision by outgoing prime minister Hazem El-Beblawi in late November 2013. He is also dean of the International Transport and Logistics faculty at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport.

13. Minister of Social Solidarity – Ghada Waly

Waly is the secretary-general of the Social Fund for Development (SFD), a governmental entity that provides start-up companies with financial help and other services. Her past experience includes a stint at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) where she worked towards poverty reduction and job creation. She has previously called on the Egyptian government to encourage entrepreneur innovation and development in the microfinance sector.

Waly was also a board member of the Consumer Protection Agency, the first government body for consumer protection, which was created in 2006. She studied at Colorado State University in the US, earning a bachelor’s in arts and humanities in 1987 and a master’s in 1990.
14. Minister of Aviation – Mohamed Hossam Kamal

Kamal was appointed as the chairman of the national aviation company EgyptAir in August 2013. That same year he was also chosen as a representative for Arab airlines in the International Aviation Union.

Kamal’s career in the aviation industry has seen him involved with cooperation projects for fuel and equipment purchase as well as a plan to exchange used parts to cut costs on Arab airlines.

15. Minister of Local and Administrative Development – Adel Labib

Labib, 68, served as governor of several provinces under Hosni Mubarak, including Qena in Upper Egypt, Beheira in the Nile Delta, and Alexandria. There were major protests against him in Alexandria, with some local groups accusing him of mismanagement. In 2011, prime minister Essam Sharaf appointed him governor of Qena for a second time after local protesters backed him over an unpopular alternative. He was Qena governor until June 2012 when he was replaced in a reshuffle by president Mohamed Morsi.

16. Minister of Finance – Hany Kadry Demian

Demian was first deputy finance minister for seven months from October 2012 to April 2013, when he resigned for apparent unease over the rising influence of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated economists, according to sources from the finance ministry. Before this post, he was deputy minister for five years.

Demian has been a key Egyptian negotiator with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In 2008, he was appointed as the Chairman of Deputies for the IMF’s International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC). He was the IMFC’s deputy at a G20 summit and chaired the IMFC communiqué drafting sessions. He was close to Youssef Boutros Ghali, a powerful finance minister from the Hosni Mubarak era who fled the country in February 2011. Demian attended Columbia University in New York, where he received a master’s degree in international affairs and economic policy management.

17. Minister of Urban Development – Laila Iskandar

Although the ministry of urban development is a new addition, Iskandar served in the previous cabinet as minister of environment. Iskandar is an Egyptian social entrepreneur who has worked on environmental projects
that have received international recognition, notably with garbage collectors in Cairo, for which she won the Goldman Environmental Prize in 1994 and the Social Entrepreneur of the Year award from the Schwab Foundation at the World Economic Forum in 2006. During her ministerial post, she was opposed to cement plants and sought to obtain cabinet approval to render coal an alternative source of energy due to shortages in traditional fuels like natural gas. The issue remains unresolved. Iskandar studied economics and political science at Cairo University. She then went on to gain a master’s in teaching and a doctorate in education at UC Berkeley, California and Columbia University, New York respectively.

18. Minister of Defence – Sedki Sobhi

Sobhi was made a colonel general by interim president Adly Mansour, a rank historically reserved for defence ministers. Since graduating from Egypt’s Military Academy in 1976, Sobhi has held a number of senior posts, including commander of the Third Army, stationed in Suez and South Sinai, and deputy chief of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which he now heads.

19. Minister of Interior – Mohamed Ibrahim

Ibrahim was originally appointed in a cabinet reshuffle in January 2013, and was one of the few ministers to keep his post after the ouster of president Mohamed Morsi. Human rights activists and opposition figures have been calling for his dismissal since the dispersal of pro-Morsi protest camps in Rabaa Al-Adawiya and Nahda squares left hundreds dead. Under Ibrahim’s leadership, the police have launched a broad crackdown on Islamists and more recently on secular opposition activists. Ibrahim’s main challenge has been a militant insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula and a growing number of terrorist attacks across the country that have killed dozens of police and soldiers.

20. Minister of Electricity – Mohamed Shaker

Shaker is chairman of Shaker Group, a consultancy and engineering firm that specialises in electricity projects. His firm is currently designing and constructing the power generation plant of the Cairo Metro’s third phase. It has also built major transmission lines and power generation plants across Egypt and other countries.

21. Minister of Manpower – Nahed El-Ashri
El-Ashri headed the department of labour relations and collective bargaining at the ministry under Morsi and in El-Beblawi’s cabinet. She has worked with most of the other cabinet ministers, and has played a major role in negotiations with striking workers.

The newly-appointed ministers are:

1. Minister of Transport – Hany Dahy

Dahy served as head Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation (EGPC) from 2011 until his retirement in 2012. In his capacity as EGPC head, Dahy was one of the authorities responsible for the decision to terminate Egypt’s natural gas export contract with Israel.

2. Minister of Environment – Khaled Fahmy

Fahmy served as Egypt’s minister of environment during Morsi’s reign from January to July 2013, quitting as part of mass resignations in the cabinet before Morsi’s ouster.

He received his PhD in economics in 1984 from the University of Economic Sciences, Bruno Leuschner. He was Deputy Chief of party in Chemonics International from 2005 to 2008.

3. Minister of Foreign Affairs – Sameh Shoukry

Shoukry served as Egypt’s ambassador to the United States from 2008 to 2012.

He received his bachelor’s degree in law from Ain Shams University in 1975.

Shoukry previously served as secretary for information to deposed president Hosni Mubarak from 1995 to 1999. He was also Egypt’s permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva from 2005 to 2008 and ambassador to Austria from 1999 to 2003.

4. Minister of Culture – Gaber Asfour

Asfour served briefly as minister of culture following the 25 January 2011 uprising, from 31 January to 8 February 2011. A literary critic and author, Asfour held the post of the General Secretary of the Supreme Council for Culture, where he focused on the department of literary translations.
Asfour later left the department to create the National Translation Foundation, which he headed and secured funding for from the Ministry of Culture. For several years, Asfour was also editor-in-chief of Fousoul, a literary quarterly publication. In 2008 he was awarded the UNESCO-Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture.

5. Minister of International Cooperation – Naglaa El-Ahwany

El-Ahwany is the second woman to be appointed as minister of international cooperation, in the footsteps of Fayza Aboul-Naga. She was appointed as economic advisor to Egypt’s cabinet in May 2011. An economic researcher at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Cairo, she has published several studies on informal labour and rural development, issues that are particularly relevant to Egypt’s economic agenda. She is also responsible for many publications on development issues, workers’ rights and legal empowerment of the poor. El-Ahwany served as director of the European Studies Centre at the faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University and is a member of the National Council for Women’s (NCW) economic committee.

6. Minister of Investment – Ashraf Salman

Salman is currently CEO of Cairo Financial Holding, a Cairo-based investment bank of which he was a co-founder. Founded in 2008, the bank has as an authorised capital of LE500 million and a paid-in capital of LE240 million. Salman is an experienced financier, with over 20 years of experience with the public and private sector. A member of the Management Development Centre for Industry, Salman was one of the architects of Egypt’s privatisation program under the Mubarak regime in the 1990s, taking part in the restructurings and valuations of public and private companies.

7. Minister of Justice – Mahfouz Saber

Saber is head of Mansoura’s Appeals Court. He was the secretary-general for the parliamentary election commission in the 2010 parliamentary polls, which are widely known to have been rigged.

8. Minister of Higher Education – Sayed Abdel-Khalek

Abdel-Khalek is head of Mansoura University, where he was previously dean of the law school. He graduated from Cairo University in 1976 with a bachelor’s degree in law.
9. Minister of Transitional Justice – Ibrahim El-Henedy

El-Henedy is head of Egypt’s Illicit Gains Authority, which in the past has investigated corruption charges on a host of prominent figures from Mubarak’s regime.

10. Minister of Scientific Research – Sherif Hamad

Hamad is the dean of engineering at Ain Shams University, where he also received his PhD in engineering in 1992. He previously served as the engineering department’s dean for student affairs.

11. Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources – Hossam El-Din Moghazi

Moghazi wrote his Master’s thesis on groundwater hydrology in Wadi El-Natroun, and a PhD thesis at London University on the optimal design of wells to exploit groundwater in arid regions.

He has been a professor of irrigation engineering at Alexandria University since 2000 and department head since 2010. He has worked as a consultant to the irrigation ministry on several projects.

12. Minister of Agriculture – Adel El-Beltagi

El-Beltagi has a PhD in plant physiology from a British University, and is a fellow of the World Academy of Sciences. He has headed the Global Forum for Agricultural Research since 2006, the International Association for the Development of Dryland since 2003, and the Council of Agricultural Research and Development since 2007. His research focuses on agriculture in arid lands. He has participated in the authorship of more than 140 scientific publications at the national and international level. He was awarded the State Award for Agricultural Science and Developed Technological Sciences in 2008: the Sultan Qaboos Insignia for Science, Culture and Arts: the Insignia of Independence from King Abdullah II of Jordan in 2005: the Medal of Honour from France in 2003: the Gold Medal of the Armenian Ministry of Agriculture in 2003: the Golden Pen of the International Society for Horticultural Science in 1982 and an honorary doctorate in science from Khartoum University in Sudan in 2006.

13. Minister of Antiquities – Mamdouh El-Damaty

Head of the antiquities department at Ain Shams University since 2006, El-Damaty received his BA and MA in ancient Egyptian antiquities from Cairo University, and a PhD in ancient Egyptian antiquities from a German
University. He was deputy secretary of the Egyptian Museum from 1981 to 1987, and secretary of the Museum of the Faculty of Antiquities, Cairo University from 1988 to 1996. He has been on the board of directors of several cultural, scientific and archaeological institutions in Egypt.

El-Damaty received the Order of Knight from Italy’s president in 2004.

June 23, 2014: Egyptian Court Sentences Al-Jazeera Journalists to 7 Years’

(VoA) - An Egyptian court has sentenced three Al-Jazeera journalists to seven years each in prison on charges of supporting the banned Muslim Brotherhood. The court in Cairo issued its verdict Monday in the case that has drawn international condemnation. Australian Peter Greste and his two colleagues were were arrested in December at a Cairo hotel where they were working after Egyptian authorities closed the Qatar-based television network’s bureau. Ahead of the verdict, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said he told Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi that Greste was simply reporting on events and not promoting the Brotherhood.

“I did make the point that as an Australian journalist, Peter Greste, would not have been supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, he would have simply been reporting on the Muslim Brotherhood and the point I made was that in the long run, a free and vigorous media are good for democracy, good for security, good for stability,” said Abbott. Greste and his two colleagues were arrested in December at a Cairo hotel where they were working after Egyptian authorities closed the Qatar-based television network’s bureau. The case, and cases against other journalists, have sparked an international outcry, including from press freedom groups who have urged authorities to release any detained journalists and allow for free expression.

Last week, Egypt freed another Al-Jazeera journalist who spent 10 months in prison without being charged. Prosecutors ordered the release of Abdullah Elshamy for health reasons after a hunger strike that he began in January to protest his detention. Egyptian authorities have carried out a crackdown on the Brotherhood since Sissi, then the army chief, led the
ouster of president Mohamed Morsi last July. Since then, Egypt has drafted a new constitution and voted Sissi into office, and plans to hold parliamentary elections later this year. (Text ends)
September 15, 2014: Former Army field marshal Abdul Fattah al-Sisi has been president of Egypt for 100 days. He was elected in May 2014, almost a year after he removed his predecessor, President Mohammed Morsi, from office. While some Egyptians celebrated the possibility that Mr Sisi would bring stability to their country, others feared that a return to the authoritarian security state that prevailed under Hosni Mubarak.

November 29, 2014: Egypt trials: Mubarak officials' charges and verdicts

DEFENDANT Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, former president-

High-profile court cases against Mubarak-era officials in the post-revolutionary period.

CHARGES: Conspiring in the murder of protesters in 2011 - case dropped in November 2014 Corruption over the sale of gas to Israel at below-market prices - case dropped in November 2014 Other corruption - case dropped in November 2014 Embezzlement of $18m earmarked for renovation of presidential palaces

VERDICT: Convicted of embezzlement in May 2014 and sentenced to three years in prison WHEREABOUTS: Under house arrest at Maadi Military Hospital, Cairo

PROFILE:
Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, former Egyptian president

Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt for almost 30 years until he was swept from power in a wave of mass protests in February 2011.

Few expected that the little-known vice-president who was elevated to the presidency in the wake of Anwar Sadat’s 1981 assassination would hold on to the country's top job for so long.

Sadat was assassinated by Islamist militants at a military parade in Cairo, and Mubarak was lucky to escape the shots as he sat next to him.

Since then, he has survived at least six assassination attempts - the narrowest escape shortly after his arrival in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, in 1995 to attend an African summit, when his limousine came under attack.
Besides his knack for dodging bullets, the former air force commander also managed to keep a hold on power by positioning himself as a trusted Western ally and fighting off a powerful opposition movement at home.

It all came to an end in a televised address on 1 February 2011, following mass protests in Cairo and other cities. Mubarak announced he had decided not to stand for re-election later that year.

Protests continued and on 10 February he appeared on state television to say he was handing over powers to his vice-president, but would remain as president.

The following day Vice-President Omar Suleiman made a terse announcement saying Mubarak was stepping down and the military’s supreme council would run the country.

On trial

By late May 2011, judicial officials announced that Mr Mubarak, along with his two sons - Alaa and Gamal - would stand trial over the deaths of anti-government protesters.

So began a protracted series of court appearances - with the former president often been seen in the dock in an upright stretcher wearing his trademark sunglasses.

He has steadfastly argued his innocence - telling a retrial in August that that he was approaching the end of his life "with a good conscience".

On 2 June 2012 he was found guilty of complicity in the murder of some of the demonstrators who took part in the wave of protests that began on 25 January 2011. Along with his former Interior Minister, Habib al-Adly, he was sentenced to life imprisonment for his crimes.

In January 2013 a court upheld an appeal against Mubarak's and al-Adly's convictions and granted retrials. Mubarak and his sons were also ordered to be retried on corruption charges for which they were originally acquitted.

Mubarak was released from prison in August that year but placed under house arrest before being transferred to a military hospital.

In May 2014, Mubarak was found guilty of embezzlement, and sentenced to three years in prison. His sons were sentenced to four years each.
In November 2014, he was finally acquitted in a retrial of conspiring to kill protesters during the 2011 uprising against his rule. At the same time, he was also acquitted of corruption charges involving gas exports to Israel.

Early life

Born in 1928 in a small village in Menofya province near Cairo, Muhammad Hosni Sayyid Mubarak insisted on keeping his private life out of the public domain while president.

Married to a half-British graduate of the American University in Cairo, Suzanne Mubarak, he was known to lead a strict life with a fixed daily schedule that began at 0600.

Never a smoker or a drinker, he built himself a reputation as a fit man who led a healthy life.

In his younger days, close associates often complained of the president's schedule, which began with a workout in the gym or a game of squash.

He was sworn in as president on 14 October 1981, eight days after the Sadat assassination.

Despite having little popular appeal or international profile at the time, the burly military man used his sponsorship of the issue behind Sadat's killing - peace with Israel - to build up his reputation as an international statesman.

**Emergency rule**

In effect, Mr Mubarak ruled as a quasi-military leader when he took power.

For his entire period in office, he kept the country under emergency law, giving the state sweeping powers of arrest and curbing basic freedoms.

The government argued the draconian regime was necessary to combat Islamist terrorism, which came in waves during the decades of Mr Mubarak's rule - often targeting Egypt's lucrative tourism sector.

He presided over a period of domestic stability and economic development that meant most of his fellow countrymen accepted his monopolisation of power.
But towards the end of his tenure in power, Mr Mubarak felt for the first time the pressure to encourage democracy, both from within Egypt, and from his most powerful ally, the United States.

Many supporters of reform doubted the veteran ruler's sincerity when he said he was all for opening up the political process.

Ahead of his declaration that he would not to stand again for the presidency, the US had heaped pressure on him to stand aside, calling for an "orderly transition" of power to a more democratic system.

Mr Mubarak won three elections unopposed since 1981, but for his fourth contest in 2005 - after a firm push from the US - he changed the system to allow rival candidates.

Critics said the election was heavily weighted in favour of Mr Mubarak and the National Democratic Party (NDP). They accused the Egyptian leader of presiding over a sustained campaign of suppressing opposition groups, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood.

Health fears

The length of his time in power, along with his age and possible successors, had all been sensitive subjects in Egypt until the mass protests allowed the Egyptian people to find a voice.

People around Mr Mubarak said his health and vigour belied his age - although a couple of health scares served as a reminder of his advancing years.

Rumours about the president's health gathered pace when he travelled to Germany in March 2010 for gall bladder surgery. They flared every time he missed a key gathering or disappeared from the media spotlight for any conspicuous length of time.

However much Egyptian officials tried to deny them, they kept circulating, with reports in the Israeli and pan-Arab media.

The days of mass protests in Egyptian cities prompted Mr Mubarak to finally name a vice-president. On 29 January 2011, intelligence chief Omar Suleiman was elevated to the role in what was seen as an attempt by Mr Mubarak to bolster his support in the military.

Two weeks later Mr Mubarak's three-decade rule was over, and in March he was under arrest.
In the past, Mr Mubarak had said he would continue to serve Egypt until his last breath.

In his speech on 1 February 2011, he said: "This dear nation... is where I lived, I fought for it and defended its soil, sovereignty and interests. On its soil I will die. History will judge me like it did others." (Text ends)

Egypt: British embassy suspends services for security reasons

BBC News (December 7, 2014) The British embassy in Cairo has suspended public services for security reasons, the Foreign Office has confirmed.

A spokeswoman would not confirm the nature of the security issue, but said staff were working with Egyptian officials to enable work to resume.

The British Consulate-General in Alexandria is operating as normal, the Foreign Office website said.

Alternative arrangements are in place for some embassy services.

They can be viewed on the Foreign Office website.

'Heightened threat'

Members of the public are urged not to visit the embassy, which was also closed in 2013 during the protests that saw President Mohamed Morsi ousted.

In its travel advice for Egypt, the Foreign Office urges vigilance.

It says there is a "heightened threat of terrorist attacks globally against UK interests and British nationals from groups or individuals motivated by the conflict in Iraq and Syria."

It adds: "Terrorists continue to plan attacks in Egypt. Attacks could be indiscriminate and occur without prior warning.

"Foreigners could be targeted in tourist resorts or other locations frequented by foreigners. Previous attacks have almost exclusively targeted the security forces, their facilities and other government buildings.

"You should take great care near these places."

(A prospective Reflection) No one quite predicted an Arab spring. Yet, three of the longest serving Arab leaders in Africa who have ruled their countries with an iron fist for decades, have fallen by the Arab Spring in 2011. Now, the likes of Robert Mugabe (of Zimbabwe) take the number one spots of the longest serving Presidents being in power for over three decades. Elsewhere, amongst the Nile basin countries, the ‘new comers’ such as Yoweri Museveni (of Uganda), Omar Al Beshir (of Sudan), Kagami (of Rwanda), Afewerki (of Eritrea) are still going on ‘strong’ after over two decades in power (not counting their years at the helm as guerrilla leaders).

Most of the Nail Basin ‘new’ leaders, as their old compatriots, came to power leading a successful gorilla wars and invariably promising the African renaissance of free market and democratic governance. After two decades, none of them have relinquished power. Nor seem to have an intention to do so in the near future. In common, they clutched to political powers for prolonged time, winning three or more consecutive ‘free elections’ on their own terms of democratic electoral system.

All of the above has been going on against the background of poor governance and economic performance as well as various forms of human rights repressions. The recent global financial crisis and food price hike, exacerbated by increasing population and erratic climate change, have not helped to alleviate the simmering political and economic discontents. According to well-established local east African newspapers, the prices of basic foods such as sugar and loaf of bread in Kenya (in most of the Nile basin countries for that matter) are reported to be equal or more than in USA. Recently, a family friend who paid me a visit to the UK from Ethiopia (one of the poorest country in the world), commented that the cost of food appears to be cheaper here than in Africa if one takes into account the quality and quantity. Given the obvious significant differences in wages and work opportunities between Africa and the West, one can imagine how basic survival is becoming increasingly unbearable for the majority of people in that part of the world. Slowly but surely, the whole situation is crimping into the conscious of the wider population, pointing only to one direction of possible public revolt.

In the light of the above, unless meaningful positive changes that appeal to the wider society are realised and unless the long-serving leaders pave the way for genuinely inclusive governance, it would be difficult to see
how the current status quos can be maintained for long. In other words, how can an Arab Spring style revolution with uncertain consequences can be avoided, whether it is triggered by poor economic conditions and hunger or the brewing dissatisfaction of the monopoly of the political-economy by minorities?

The other critical question for a neutral observers in my position, who suffered from the after math of previous conflicts in the region, would be whether the long-overdue serving leaders of Nile Basin countries are paying enough attention or ignoring to address the looming situations. Evidently, from the tone of their voices, they are at least appear to be aware of the legacy and the threat of the Arab Spring style revolution to their overdue monopoly of power. What is not certain, however, is whether the leaders have the full grasps of the real problems and seek to pave way for lasting sustainable political solutions. Sceptics are quick to point out, referring to the noises coming out from government sources, that the leaders seem either not to have learnt from or care about the recent past history. The respective government’s spokes persons, from Zimbabwe in Southern Africa all the way to North Sudan, were quick to say that the Arab Spring countries political dynamics are very different from those of Africans. They warn, directly or indirectly, that any resistance to their authority on their backyard will not be tolerated and will be crushed and would be futile. They add that they have the people support (albeit small) and has the legitimacy to continue to rule. To quote few examples “There will be no Egyptian-like revolution here”… “We would just lock them up in jail forever in the most humane way and that would be the end of the story.” Such resolute expression of brutalization and false claims of the affection of fellow citizens, however, are neither unusual nor wise. One only needs to reflect on the most recent fate of the self-claimed the beloved Brother Leader of Libya - the late Muammar Gaddafi.

Aside the economy and democratic right issues, there is also the issue of cross countries security / insecurity which has become an entrenched feature of politics and development in the Nile Basin Africa. As I observed first-hand, conflict inside any one country or between any two will always have peculiar major ramifications for all the rest in this region. It has a tendency of resulting in the breaking and making up of states, including producing a new land-locked countries. The separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia (land-locked now) in 1993 and the independence of South Sudan (also land-locked now) in 2011 are clear examples. Not far away, Somaliland is another potential case for divorce as it has been running its
affairs separately from the rest of Somalia for over 20 years. To put flame on the fire, the longest on-going civil war in Southern Somalia, is reported to be fueled by proxy war of opposing neighboring countries as well as other external players across the sea. It is a tough place to be to all concerned.

Cognizant of the problematic cross-countries security threats, the ‘new’ generation Nile Basin leaders have been taking a new positive measures by forming IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development), which is supported by the international communities and tasked to promote and implement mutual activism and intervention. To cite an example, except Sudan and Eritrea, the remaining regional countries have sent troops to Somalia to oust the radical Islamist insurgents. More recently, Ethiopia sent peace keepers to help maintain peace in the disputed oil reach border region of Abiye in Sudan. The overall aim of IGAD appears to be (a) avoiding or minimizing the cycles of old conflicts by not harboring opposition movements on each other’s soil (b) harnessing the mutual political and economy interdependent, thereby, promote development.

Although the roles of IGAD and the efforts put so far are largely commendable, it is already proven to be a complex and difficult task. Whilst the countries appear to solve some of the nationalistic political problems, they don’t seem to provide solutions to the underlying mutual economic ties which, in turn, affect security and prosperity. The on-going problem of fair share of oil resources between North and South Sudan is one example. Another example is the land-locked Ethiopia, which has so far shown no desire to use the ideal port of Asab, preferring to stifle its arc-foe Eritrea economically. Unfortunately, what all these point out is that politics still appear to overshadow the region’s interlocking economic potentials of rational use of natural and human resources.

Whatever the challenges and the situations are it is neither wise nor viable for the long-serving Nile Basin leaders, like all the previous dictators before them, to try to hang on power for life. Unfortunately, although the recent dramatic fall from grace of north African Arab countries leaders could send a clear message or serve as a lesson to any rational person, the people in power are appears to be typically insular to the real situations. Some still try to prolong their stay in power by re-branding the same old system under different guises, what some commentators characterize us pseudo-federal system and ethno-national system or even own terms of multi-party system. Others reposition themselves by being a strategic Western and regional ally, for example, in playing key roles in
the common cause of fighting international terrorism. Nevertheless, the recent Arab springs show that even the West / International Community strategic support will not insulate autocratic regimes, when the unstoppable mass revolt commences.

Finally, it worth noting that in this global information and communication age, ordinary people are more aware today about the rights and responsibilities of citizens as well as the ruling elites than previously. The time and game of manipulation and distortion of exceeding constitutional mandate are almost up. In view of this, the remaining critical question would be, who will be the next responsible and rational leader that relinquish power on own will before it is too late and being pushed off. Although they are few and far between, there are exemplars leaders in Africa that one can follow. Attempts by the seemingly powerful out-of-touch rulers to suppress the wills and winds of democratic change have so far failed. It only eventually leads to a disastrous fall from grace and the chaos we witnessed in the aftermath of the Arab-Spring. In connection to forthcoming ‘General Elections’ in the neighboring East African nations of Ethiopia and Sudan, for example, we hear reports of on-going free media and legitimate opposition movements repressions. This needs not be repeated. In particular, those in the helm of power have both the responsibility and the means to avert it by doing the right thing. Dr Samuel Ayele Bekalu is a Research and Development Education Fellow based in Leeds – Bradford (UK). Aside Development Education, his recent work focuses in examining the plights of and representing refugees and migrants from East / Horn of Africa, including the ‘boat people’ crossing the rough Mediterranean Sea to reach the shore of Europe and beyond. He can be reached via private e-mail and web (Samuel@ayele90.freeserve.co.uk, www.ILPA.country experts.org.uk)

Egypt's Sisi says Ethiopians 'rescued' from Libya

By Mahmoud Mourad, AFP (May 7, 2015)

CAIRO - President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said Egypt had "rescued" 27 Ethiopians from war-torn Libya, as state television showed him greeting the group at Cairo airport Thursday.

It was not immediately clear how the Ethiopians were rescued, but Sisi's office said the group flown in on an Egyptian plane was "liberated by Egyptian and Libyan security services." "All efforts were made to bring the Ethiopians to Egypt safely... Egyptian services participated in this effort to
protect, rescue and secure our Ethiopian brothers," Sisi told reporters at Cairo airport.

Their release comes weeks after a purported video released by ISIS showed the executions of some 30 Ethiopian Christians captured in Libya. Sisi said Egypt was "pained by the gruesome beheading of innocent Ethiopians in Libya" and that the rescued Ethiopians were living in dire conditions in the war-strewn country. "What is happening in Libya is a matter that concerns us and we tell the whole world that Libya should return to be a safe and stable country for its people and even to its visitors," Sisi said.

Libya has plunged into chaos since the toppling of long-time autocrat Moammar Gadhafi, with rival militias fighting for the control of country's oilfields and territories. The killing of Ethiopians came weeks after the jihadists posted a similar video showing the beheadings of 21 Coptic Christians, all but one of them Egyptians, on a beach in Libya.

The killing of Egyptian Christians had prompted airstrikes by Cairo targeting ISIS targets inside Libya. Sisi has repeatedly called for a joint Arabic military force to fight jihadists in the region, and at an Arab League summit in March leaders of the region agreed to establish such a force. The details of the joint Arab force have yet to be worked out.

Since his election last year, Sisi has been working to improve relations with Addis Ababa amid a dispute over Nile water rights. Ethiopia began diverting the Blue Nile in May 2013 to build a 6,000 megawatt dam, which will be Africa's largest when completed in 2017. This has raised fears in Cairo that Egypt's share of the Nile water would fall. In March, Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan signed an agreement of principles on the dam to ease tensions. (Text ends)

July 6, 2015: Egypt News: Egyptian military spokesman says the army killed 241 in Sinai from 1 to 5 July. The Egyptian army spokesman "killed more than 241 terrorists in northern Sinai," today at lunch at the Egyptian army turned their bodies in northern Sinai with the same terrorists who killed two days ago more than 30 members of the Egyptian army.

July 5, 2015: EGYPT: Army kills 63 militants in North Sinai'

Security sources in Egypt said the army killed 63 Islamist militants in raids in the wilderness of northern Sinai air raids on Sunday at a time when the country is facing increasingly violent armed attacks and taken from the
area base. The sources said that troops killed the militants in the villages located between the cities of Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid. The army also found four militant hideouts and attacked them using Apache helicopters and ground troops. Also attacked vehicles belonging to the militants. 

recently saw the Sinai is one of the most violent clashes between security forces and militants since the army statement isolate former President Mohamed Morsi, who belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 after mass protests against his rule. and killed mandate of the Sinai group affiliated with al Islamic State of hundreds of army and police personnel. Since isolate Morsi. She knew the group in the past on behalf of supporters between the sacred before allegiance to the organization of the Islamic state. Although the Sinai, are a security headache for Egypt and its neighbors for a long time but isolate Morsi caused the escalation of violence and militant attacks which extended its scope to the outside of the peninsula. On Monday the killing of the Attorney General Hisham Barakat, a car bomb to become the largest state official to be killed since isolate Morsi. The Egyptian government officials say that the Muslim Brotherhood group linked to Sinai attacks. The group says it is a peaceful movement and want to end what it calls the military coup against Morsi across the street protests. The Egyptian Interior Ministry said in a statement on Sunday it had arrested 12 members of the Muslim Brotherhood formed three terrorist cells to carry out attacks on the men of the army, police and targeting military and police installations. As I mentioned The official news agency Middle East said that the prosecutor referred to the trial of 22 people accused of planting bombs near the vital areas including the High Court and government buildings.

**EGYPT: Sinai operations will last 'until IS removed'**

(News updates) Egypt has vowed to rid its Sinai Peninsula of militants after major clashes with Islamic State fighters there killed more than 100 people. Operations will not stop until the area is cleared of all "terrorist concentrations", the army said. Air strikes continued into the early hours of Thursday. The army says 17 soldiers were among those killed after militants launched near-simultaneous raids on military checkpoints in Sheikh Zuweid and Rafah. Local reports put army casualties higher.

The attack was one of the largest co-ordinated assaults in the area yet by Islamic State's (IS) local affiliate, Sinai Province. The peninsula has been under a state of emergency and a curfew since October, when dozens of soldiers were killed in a militant attack.
Separately on Wednesday, security officials said nine members of the now banned Muslim Brotherhood, including former MP Nasr al-Hafi, had been killed in a police raid on a flat in western Cairo. The security situation in Egypt has worsened since the assassination of the public prosecutor, Hisham Barakat, three days ago in the capital.

Analysts said the car bomb attack that killed Mr Barakat also bore the hallmarks of Sinai Province, which was known as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis until it pledged allegiance to Islamic State in November and changed its name.

'100% under control'

In a statement, the army said it had killed "100 members of the terrorist elements" and injured them in "large numbers" in fighting in North Sinai. It said the operation left 17 soldiers, including four officers, dead.

By late on Wednesday, an army spokesman said the situation was "100% under control" and militants had withdrawn from Sheikh Zuweid. Brig. Mohamed Samir said: "The forces on the ground are completely under control. The group who were captured are being interrogated by the investigation team."

Eyewitness earlier reported seeing militants roaming the streets of the northern town of Sheikh Zuweid, clashing with armed forces. Five army checkpoints were also targeted by car bomb attacks. The town's main police station came under mortar and RPG fire, and militants reportedly planted bombs along a road leading to a nearby army camp. Egypt sent F-16s jets to bombard the militants in several locations.

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu said his country sent its "condolences to the government and people of Egypt for the fallen Egyptians slain by IS terror". He added: "We see IS at the gates, across the border in the Golan, across the border in Egypt... We must stand up to all the forces of militant Islam, those led by Iran, those led by IS."

Since October, police and army patrols have been stepped up to deal with militancy in Sinai - which has been on the rise since the military overthrew Islamist President Mohammed Morsi in July 2013. At least 600 police and armed forces personnel have since been killed. A buffer zone along the border with Gaza was also created and underground tunnels - which the military says were used to smuggle weapons from the Palestinian enclave - have been destroyed.
Following the deaths in Cairo, the Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement saying that several of its leaders had been "murdered... in cold blood" and urged Egyptians to "rise in revolt" against the actions of the government of President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi.

The interior ministry said the men had been fugitive Brotherhood leaders who were meeting to plan "acts of terrorism and sabotage". The Muslim Brotherhood, however, said they were part of its committee supporting the families of detainees and members who had been killed. (Text ends)

MARITIME: Egypt Launches Suez Canal Expansion'

(BBC News: August 6, 2015) Egypt has opened a major expansion of the Suez Canal, which deepens the main waterway and provides ships with a 35km (22 mile) channel parallel to it. At the inauguration, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi welcomed foreign leaders aboard a historic yacht as helicopters and fighter jets flew by. The expansion aims to increase the traffic handled by the canal. Egypt’s government hopes the revenues will revive the economy – but analysts have questioned the projections. They point out that the volume of world trade has not been growing at the pace needed to deliver the sums Egypt hopes to collect.

Egyptians commenting to the international press and on Twitter appear divided over the project, with many asking if the $8.2bn (£5.3bn) spent on the expansion could have been better deployed on improving infrastructure and public services. The expansion will allow for two-way traffic along part of the route, as well as for larger vessels overall. The construction of the new lane began a year ago, on the orders of Mr Sisi. At the inauguration ceremony in the town of Ismailia, the president appeared in military uniform and sunglasses aboard the El-Mahrousa – the yacht that was the first vessel to pass through the canal when it was built in 1869.

The former military leader, elected last year as a civilian, welcomed foreign guests including French President Francois Hollande and Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. Fighter jets and helicopters flew above the ceremony. On the streets of Cairo, banners described the expanded canal as Egypt’s “gift to the world”. Pro-government media have hailed the expansion of the canal as a national triumph, and a turning point after years of instability. However, many analysts doubt if the new venture will deliver the anticipated benefits.
Ahmed Kamaly, an economist with the American University in Cairo, told Reuters news agency that the Egyptian projections were “wishful thinking”. “There was no viability study done, or known of,” he was quoted as saying. He added that the immediate benefits from the expansion were more likely to be political than economic, uniting people “around a national project”. Takings from Suez could also be hit by an expansion of the Panama Canal, due to be completed next year, which will compete for traffic along the Asia-North America route.

Security was tightened for the inauguration ceremony amid fears of attack by militants allied to Islamic State. The militants, based in the Sinai peninsula, have killed hundreds of people since the military overthrew the Islamist government of president Mohammed Morsi in 2013. The original canal currently handles 7% of global sea-borne trade. The waterway connects the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, providing the shortest sea link between Asia and Europe. Its nationalisation led to a brief war in 1956, pitting Egypt against the UK, France and Israel. (Text ends)
COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location: Northeastern corner of Africa.

Official title of the state: Arab Republic of Egypt (Misr)
Jumhuriyat Misr Al-Arabiyyah (Arabic)

Flag description:

Three equal horizontal bands of red (top), white, and black: the national emblem (a gold Eagle of Saladin facing the hoist side with a shield superimposed on its chest above a scroll bearing the name of the country in Arabic) centered in the white band: the band colors derive from the Arab Liberation flag and represent oppression (black), overcome through bloody struggle (red), to be replaced by a bright future (white). Note: similar to the flag of Syria, which has two green stars in the white band, Iraq, which has an Arabic inscription centered in the white band, and Yemen, which has a plain white band.

Neighbours

Libya on W., Sudan on S. Israel i.e. Asia Minor on E.

Land boundaries: total 2,665 km. Border countries: Asia-minor (Gaza-strip) 11km, Israel 266 km. Libya 1,115 km, Sudan 1,273 km.

Local division

29 Governorates (Muhafazat).

Government type

Arab Republic - semi-presidential

Legislation chamber

Bicameral system of parliament

Form of State

Republic:

President elected by popular vote for a six-year term with no term-limits.
Arab republic with two legislative houses consists of the Majlis Al Shoura (Advisory council) 264 seats, members to serve for six-year terms. The People's Assembly (Majlis Al-Shaab) 454 seats, members are elected by popular vote to serve for five-year terms.

Executive branch

Separated by chief of State and head of Government. President elected by a National referendum through a Yes-No vote for six-year terms without presidential term limits. Head of Government to be appointed by the President. President, Prime Minister, Bi-cameral parliamentary system.

Former Rulers

1922 - 1953 King Farouk
1953-1956: General Mohammed Naguib
1956-1970: Colonel Gamal Abed Al Nasser
2011-2012: Field Marshal Mohammed Tantawi
2012 – Mohammed Mursi
2014- Abdulfatah Al-Sisi

Judicial chamber

Supreme constitutional court.

Capital city

Cairo (Arabic El-Qahirah) Altitude 25 mtrs/82 ft

Geographic coordinates - 30.03N , 31.15E. The national capital of Egypt, a port on the Nile near the head of the delta, and the largest city in Africa."El-Qahirah" is Arabic meaning for "the conqueror", believed to be founded on about 969 century by the fatamid dynasty it was later fortified against the crusaders by Salhadin, whos citadel (built in C. 1179) still survives. Cairo’s mosques include that of Al-Azhar, a religious centre (972) housing an Islamic university said to be the oldest in the world and the leading centre of Koranic studies. Islamic Cairo has been designated a
world heritage site by UNESCO. Old Cairo, a crowded maze of ancient houses and 400 mosques lies in the south of the built-up area: new Cairo with its modern hotels and office buildings, and three universities, lies to the north and west. Cairo has many light industries including tourism.

Names of main towns
Alexandria (Al-Iskandriyah), Suez (As-Suways), Giza (Al-Jizah), Ismaelia (Al-Ismiliyah), EL-Kharga, Mehalla, El-Shubra

Date of independence
22nd February, 1922

Religions
Muslim (mostly Sunni) 90%, Coptic-Christians 9%, Christian 1%

Main spoken languages
Arabic (official), English and French widely understood by educated classes.

Currency unit
Egyptian Pound (EGP)=100 Piastres

Area in Km2
1,001,450.00

Country area comparison in Africa
12 out of 55 states

Demographic terms:
Average annual population growth rate 1.997 %
Birth rate 25.02 births per 1,000 population
Death rate 4.85 deaths per 1,000 population
Average life expectancy: 72.4 years
Male 69.82 years: Female 75.1 years
Illiteracy rate (%)  
Male: 19, Female: 40

Average per capita income
USD 6, 200

Population density
83/km²

Contributor groups
Farming, Fishing: 14, Industry: 17, Social service: 51

Main Export Items:
Petroleum products, raw-Cotton, yarn, textiles, metal products

Economy is based on:
Agro-industry, Tourism & Suez-canal port services for shipping. A growing population against dwindling natural resources and high unemployment rates. There is high rate of migration to other countries in search for employment opportunities by young graduates.

Climate
Desert: Hot and dry summer with mild-winter

Extremes:
Lowest point: Qattara Depression -133 meters.

Highest point: Mt. Catherine 2,629 meters.

Weather of the Capital city (Greater-Cairo) average annual temperature 21.5 oc.

Altitude 25 mtrs/82 ft

Hottest Month July 21-36oc Daily Ave.

Coldest Month January 8-18oc.

Driest Month July-August 0 mm average Rf.
Wettest Month December 5mm average Rf.

Measures

Metric system, local measures also used

Time zone

GMT/UTC+2 (In summer times, 3 hours ahead)

Public holidays

All Muslim holidays, Coptic-Christian holidays

Ethnic groups

Egyptian Bedouins, Nubians.

Topographic & Environmental concern

Almost entirely desolate and barren with hills and mountains in E. and along Nile. The Nile-valley where most of the people live stretches 550 miles. Environment: Agricultural land being lost to urbanization and windblown sands: increasing soil salination below Aswan High Dam: desertification: oil pollution threatening coral reefs, beaches, and marine habitats: other water pollution from agricultural pesticides, raw sewage, and industrial effluents: limited natural freshwater resources away from the Nile, which is the only perennial water source: rapid growth in population overstraining the Nile and natural resources.
Economic Overview

Industry

Textiles, food processing, tourism, pharmaceuticals, hydro-carbons, chemicals, petro-chemicals, cement, construction, light-manufacturing, canal services. Construction and service sectors are the main economic drivers.

Chief crops

Cotton (one of largest product), rice, beans, fruits, grapes, vegetables, sugarcane, cattle, sheep, goats.

Natural resources

Oil, Gas, Phosphate, Iron ore, Gold, Manganese, Limestone, Gypsum, Talc, Asbestos, Lead, Zinc, Nile water Papyrus plant, other resources.

Land in use (%)

Arable land: 4
Grassland: NA
Forest woods: NA
Others: 98

Note: A rapidly growing population with limited arable land, faces dependence on the Nile River flow.

Marine

Coastline: 2450 km.

Commercial Sea ports:-

Alexandria (main port), Ismailia, Suez, Port Said

Development prospect:

Egypt's best real growth estimate for 2011 standing at a mere 1.2%, the country’s economic downturn has had a sobering effect on public morale, while paradoxically boosting the Egyptian military's standing. Egypt's foreign reserves fell to $22bn in October, down from $36bn before the
Arab uprising. The country's main foreign currency earner, tourism, picked up towards the end of the year, according to the tourism ministry, but this was after a sharp 25% drop in 2011 compared with the previous year. In the meantime, the Egyptian military has been struggling to inject aid into the economy. It turned down an IMF loan in June, 2012 saying it did not want to amass new foreign debts, but finance minister Hazem Beblawi later said that the decision might be revisited in the light of Egypt's needs. It seems that the billions of dollars of promised Arab aid might not materialize as quickly as once hoped.
EGYPT: NILE POLITICS: Irrigation, Power-Grids, Environmental concerns et-al’

River Nile:- English ‘Nile River’, Arabic ‘Baḥr Al-Nil’ or ‘Nahr Al-Nīl’ river, the father of African rivers and the longest river in the world. It rises south of the Equator and flows northward through northeastern Africa to drain into the Mediterranean Sea. –Encyclopaedia Britannica

The Nile is the longest river in the world and runs through Rwanda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan, Sudan and Egypt, but instead of being the great uniter, the Nile has become the great divider because of a dispute that is causing serious tension between two of those countries.

Since the twelfth century AD, Christian Ethiopian kings have warned Muslim Egyptian sultans of their power to divert waters of the Blue Nile, often in response to religious conflicts. But these were hypothetical threats.

The Blue Nile River - The source of over 80pc of the water that eventually enters the Nile River system. The Blue Nile starts in Lake Tana in Ethiopia and flows through tall, narrow chasms to the Sudan border. Within Sudan, the Blue Nile meets the White Nile, in Khartoum, and from there flows into Egypt. For many years, all the Nile's water has been divided between the Sudan and Egypt: any other country that dared to touch the Nile was met with stern threats from Egypt and its protectors: first The Great Britain.

EGYPT - Gift of the Nile’

The opening sentence of Egypt's new constitution describes the country as the river Nile's gift to Egyptians. The founding myths of many ancient civilizations center on famous rivers — the Euphrates and the Tigris (Babylon), the Yangtze (China) and the Ganges (India), to name a few. However, not many are as inextricably dependent on a single river for their livelihood as Egypt is on the Nile. Egypt’s history is defined as much by the flooding and drying beds of the Nile as by the pyramids. For a country described by Herodotus as “the gift of the Nile,” control over the majestic river has been an existential Egyptian preoccupation since antiquity.

The world’s longest river is made up of a maze of tributaries. Nineteenth-century explorers went on a wild goose chase to locate the mysterious river’s murky origin before tracing it to Lake Tana in Ethiopia and the
Great Lakes in Central Africa. Two of the river’s main tributaries are the Blue Nile and the White Nile. The Blue Nile, accounting for upwards of 80 percent of the Nile waters, originates in northern Ethiopia. It makes a steep descent from Ethiopian highlands — carrying brown silt — before it joins the White Nile in Khartoum, Sudan’s capital, augmented by several large rivers from southwestern Ethiopia. The White Nile originates in Burundi and flows northward from the Great Lakes region, crossing Tanzania, Uganda, and South Sudan.

Egypt and the Nile river flow’

The Nile has been essential for civilization in Egypt and Sudan. Without that water, there would have been no food, no people, no state, and no monuments. As Herodutus famously wrote in the 5th century B.C.E., “Egypt is the gift of the Nile.” For millennia peoples have travelled along the banks of the Nile and its tributaries. Scores of ethnic groups in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan share architecture and engineering, ideas and traditions of religion and political organization, languages and alphabets, food and agricultural practices. In 3000 B.C.E., when the first Egyptian dynasty unified the lower and upper parts of the Nile River, there were no states in Eastern or Central Africa to challenge Egypt’s access to Nile waters. The Nile was a mysterious god: sometimes beneficent, sometimes vengeful. Floods between June and September, the months of peak flow, could wipe out entire villages, drowning thousands of people. Floods also brought the brown silt that nourished the delta, one of the world’s most productive agricultural regions, feeding not only Egypt but many of its neighbors.

Nile’s central importance to Egyptian life is captured in A Hymn to the Nile, recorded in Papyrus Sallier II:

Hail to thee, O Nile, that issues from the earth and comes to keep Egypt alive! ...

He that waters the meadows which He created ...

He that makes to drink the desert ...

He who makes barley and brings emmer into being ...

He who brings grass into being for the cattle ...

He who makes every beloved tree to grow ...
Oh, Nile, verdant art thou, who makes man and cattle to live.

The Nile’s seasonal flooding is a central theme in Egyptian history. The river flow follows regular patterns, increasing between May 17 and July 6, peaking in September, and then receding until the next year. But the river volume is very unpredictable, as documented by nilometers (multi-storied structures built in the river to measure water heights). Successive empires of Pharaohs, Greeks, Romans, Christian Copts, and Muslims celebrated the rising waters of the Nile and dreaded floods or droughts. Five millennia of Nile history show how years with high water have produced ample food, population growth, and magnificent monuments, as during the first five dynasties from 3050 B.C.E. to 2480 B.C.E. Periods with low water have brought famine and disorder. The Book of Genesis describes seven years of famine that historians associate with the drought of 1740 B.C.E. From the time of the Pharaohs until 1800 C.E., Egypt’s population rose and fell between 2 to 5 million, due to food availability and epidemics. The irrigation projects of the 19th century Ottoman ruler Mohammad Ali allowed year-around cultivation, causing population growth from 4 to 10 million. Since the opening of the Aswan High Dam in 1971, Egypt’s population has increased from about 30 to 83 million.

The Sources of the Nile: Despite the extraordinary importance of the Nile to people downstream, the origin of the great river was a mystery until the middle twentieth century. Herodotus speculated that the Nile arose between the peaks of Crophi and Mophi, south of the first cataract. In 140 C.E. Ptolemy suggested the source was the Mountains of the Moon, in what are now called the Ruwenzori Mountains in Uganda. The 11th century Arab geographer al-Bakri postulated West African origins, confusing the Niger River, which empties into the Atlantic Ocean, with the Nile River. In 1770 the Scottish explorer James Bruce claimed his discovery of the source in Ethiopia, while in 1862 John Hanning Speke thought he found it in Lake Victoria and the equatorial lakes. The river’s limited navigability only increased its mystery. The Blue Nile River descends 4501 feet in 560 miles from Lake Tana in the Ethiopian highlands through a deep gorge with crocodiles, hippopotamuses, and bandits to the Sudan border and the savannah. Despite the efforts of scores of intrepid adventurers, the Blue Nile in Ethiopia was not successfully navigated until 1968 by a team of British and Ethiopian soldiers and civilians equipped by the Royal Military College of Science.

Further south up the White Nile in the lakes and rivers of Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, the Egyptian cultural influence is
less pronounced, due to the Sudd, a gigantic and impassable swamp which absorbs waters from the equatorial lake tributaries. The Nile River historian Robert O. Collins reports that “no one passed through this primordial bog” until 1841. Not until the 20th century did it become clear that the Nile is part of a vast river system with dozens of tributaries, streams, and lakes, stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the remote mountains of Burundi, in tropical central Africa, and to the highlands of Ethiopia, in the Horn of Africa. Spanning more than 4,200 miles, it is the longest river in the world. It has also become clear that the volume of water which flows through the Nile is relatively small—a mere two percent in volume of the Amazon’s and fifteen percent of the Mississippi—and mostly (86%) from Ethiopia.

Who owns the Nile?

Egypt and Sudan are utterly dependent on the waters of the Nile River. Over the past century both of these desert countries have built several dams and reservoirs, hoping to limit the ravages of droughts and floods which have so defined their histories.

The Nile’s origin being outside its borders did not prevent Egypt from getting the lion’s share of its waters. The claim for exclusive ownership of the Nile waters is premised on a 1929 treaty between Egypt and Britain’s East African colonies, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. These colonies gained independence from Britain in the 1960s. The treaty awarded 57 percent of the waters to Egypt while also requiring other nations to clear with Cairo before launching any major water project on the river. Another treaty, signed in 1959 between Egypt and Sudan, raised Egypt’s share to 66 percent. The two signatories, divvying up virtually all of the Nile waters, did not even consult Ethiopia, the main source of the river. After the 1959 accord, both Egypt and Sudan built mega-dams to exploit the water for irrigation. For years, upstream Nile Basin countries — Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda — nursed misgivings about the colonial-era accord, in which they had no say. However, they grudgingly acquiesced mainly because, unlike Egypt and Sudan, whose arid lands are watered by the lone river, they are not wholly reliant on the Nile. But, finding the challenge of feeding their growing populations on rain-fed subsistence farming unbearable, upstream countries initiated negotiations in 1999 to find an equitable and reasonable way to share the Nile waters. The decade-long negotiations resulted in the 2010 Cooperative Framework Agreement, known as the Entebbe Agreement. The landmark accord, signed by the six upstream
countries, was rejected outright by both Egypt and Sudan. Touted as “an African solution for an African problem,” the agreement calls for the creation of a commission to oversee development projects on the Nile. It needed ratification by the legislatures of each of the signatory countries. But its implementation is in limbo until another Nile Basin country — for example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is now sitting on the fence signs it.

Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Historical Struggle for the Nile Waters’

Ethiopia and Egypt have had a long relationship of both harmony and discord, the latter the result of religious issues and access to Nile water, among other factors. Ethiopia’s first well documented government was in Aksum, a city-state that controlled a large empire from the Ethiopian highlands across the Red Sea to Yemen. From 100 until 800 C.E. Aksumites participated in Mediterranean and Indian Ocean trade. The cultural relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia was institutionalized when the Aksumite King Ezana converted to Christianity in 330 C.E. For 16 centuries (until 1959) the Egyptian bishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was appointed by the Egyptian patriarch in Alexandria, often under the influence of the Egyptian government.

Ethiopia is one of 10- or so on to become 11, with the newly reemerged state of South Sudan “Nile Basin Riparian countries”. With over eighty five million population is gifted with diversified and eye-catching cultural, historical and natural heritages. One of the natural resources is water. The nation is home of 12 international potential rivers. The land dispenses and contributes a lion share of water to the neighbouring countries, the country is said to have over 128.3 billion cubic meter under surface water. Thus, Ethiopia is called "water tower of Africa". Awash, Wabe-Shebelle, Omo, Baro, Mereb, tekeze, Abbay, Ganalle some among others are potential rivers those originate from Ethiopian highlands and discharge into Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, and Egypt. For the peoples of Egypt, Sudan and Somalia, life would be impossible without Nile rivers. They carry millions of tons of rich soil to Egypt, the Sudan and Somalia every year. Somalia depends heavily on the Gannaallee (Juba) and Wabee (Shaballe) rivers, which come from Ethiopia. Ethiopia supplies almost 100 per-cent of the fresh water for Somalia and Djibouti. At present the Ethiopian government depends heavily on Awash in local Oromos known as "Hawas" water as a source of electric power for its industries and irrigation water to grow sugar cane, cotton and fruits. The Wonji and Matahara sugar estates are good examples. There is a great potential in
all these rivers for the production of electric power and for irrigation. Qoqaa, Fincha, Malkaa Waakkenna, Gibee-Tiqqaa, Gibe II, dams are examples of where hydro-electric power is already being produced or in the process of being harnessed. Among the lakes are Tanna, Abbaya, Langanno and Shalla. Many of these lakes possess a great variety of fish and birds on their islands and shores. The river Wabe Shebelle flows to the Indian Ocean crossing Somalia. These rivers have been flowing to the stated destinations carrying millions tons of fertile soil and waters every year without benefiting to its own people since creation. The people of Ethiopia had been deprived of benefiting from the country's water resources. As a result, they were exposed to repeated shocking drought and famine which had claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Ethiopian tributaries contribute about 84 % of the water that flows through Sudan and reaches the Aswan Dam in Egypt. Earlier treaties of 1929 and 1959 between Egypt and the Sudan allocated three-quarters of the water to Egypt and one-quarter of it to Sudan. A lot has been said, patriotic poems have been composed, beautiful songs have sung in its honor, accords have have been signed, major-wars were fought and boundaries were demarcated, about the River-Abbay and the Blue-Nile as a whole. And on the other side, "Egypt is a gift of the Nile", people like to say in a country that worshiped the river as a God in ancient Egypt. "If Egypt is a gift of the Nile, then the "Nile is a gift of Ethiopia", Ethiopians back-fire sympathy regarding the "tikur-Abay", which is meaning for "Blue-Nile". Most of the water meandering down the lower reaches of the Nile, the world's longest river, comes from the Ethiopian highlands. "In 1805, by the time Mohammed Ali began to rule Egypt, many threats had been made by the Ethiopian emperors to stop the water reaching Egypt, most were just empty threats, but some were valid, everytime there was a new ruler in Egypt, they would threaten him and blackmail him so that, he paid gold as a gift to the Ethiopian emperor. Historically, the most important relationships Israel built in the African continent were with Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya. And it's no coincidence that all of them are upstream countries where the Nile originates. They did build relationships with other countries too. But the River-Nile was the major factor behind the formation of Israeli foreign policy and strategy", according to Egyptian historians. These fears have made Egypt suspicious about reported plans to divert the Nile to it's former enemy, possibly Israel. And they have led it into a tense stand-off with another country, possibly Ethiopia, an upstream country with the potential to dramatically affect the amount of water reaching Egypt. The battle for control of the Nile is at the heart of
geo-political rivalries with Israel and Ethiopia on the Nile remains focal, as Egyptian-Israeli affairs expert.

In 1959, Egypt & Sudan met and agreed on how to share the waters of the Nile as it flowed through their largely arid lands on the way to the Mediterranean. It was a renewal of river rights they had enjoyed since the British signed an agreement with the two countries in 1929. Ethiopia, which provides an estimated 85 percent of the flow into Lake Nasser from the Abay and other watersheds to the south, was not invited. Emperor Haile Selassie wrote a letter of protest, to no avail. After the 1979 Camp David agreement returning the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, with the announcement of late president Anwar El-Sadat the launch of the Salaam Canal which would divert Nile waters to the Peninsula by siphoning the waters beneath the Suez Canal. Lt Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, then ruler of Ethiopia, protested to the United Nations, to no avail. Tekezie and the Tana-Beles projects in Amhara and Tigrai regions, the issue of Nile politics has resurfaced once again. It is obvious that Ethiopia is located in or the proximity of a region where water is becoming a scarce resource and will likely be the source of future conflicts or wars. The pressure on or demand for this resource is increasing as a consequence of increasing population and unfavourable climatic changes in the region. Despite facing persistent and devastating famines, the Nile issue is getting onto a vital component of the national interest of Ethiopia. A study on a river basin development made in Ethiopia in the early 1960s with the help of the Americans, speaks of no less than one hundred sites naturally suited for tapping hydro-electric power and huge irrigation potential that allow multiple harvesting or crops in a given year in the Blue-Nile basin alone. Add the eastern river basins - the Wabe-Shebelle and Ghenalle. Of course, Ethiopia has not used or underused it's water resources including the waters of the Blue-Nile for various reasons, it is ironical to witness Ethiopia which is also called "Africa's water tower" suffering from periodic drought related famines, droughts or failing rains are not the sole causes of famine in Ethiopia, where in control of the fertile or productive lands of the country as perhaps on a land-selling spree a regime also should take it's significant share of blames. Ethiopia has many big rivers, about eleven lakes, nine saline lakes, four crater lakes, and over twelve major swampy areas. Almost all of the rivers flow from highlands of Ethiopia to the lowlands neighboring countries. Eg. about eighteen Ethiopian rivers flow to the Sudan and cross the border at six different places, three of them being big perennial rivers from southern Ethiopia while the other three are seasonal rivers of the north. Also some four rivers from the Arssi-Bale highlands flow toward Somalia in different directions, three of them
merging at the Ethio-Somali border to form the Wabi-Shebelle as known as Juba-River in Somalia. The Omo-River flows from the southwest highlands of Kaffa region to Kenya and forms "Lake Turkana", the biggest desert lake in the world. The Awash-River ends up in lake Abbe at the Ethio-Djibouti border. Unlike what is traditionally claimed, major Ethiopian rivers do not originate from the semi-arid semien highlands of Abyssinya or from the desert lowlands of Afar or Ogaden. Instead, Ethiopian primary water sources are formed from the streams and lakes of the country's rainforest regions. Rivers that arise from the northern semi-arid highlands of the Amhara and Tigrai regions do flow westwards in the direction of the Sudan. Those rivers arise from the west side of the rift valley in Arssi, Bale, Chercher and Gara-Mulatta mountains flow towards Somalia. Those originating from Tulama (in central region of Shoa) and from the rift valley area flows towards Djibouti, whereas numerous others originating from the tropical rainforest highlands of southwestern Ethiopia flow in three directions to the Blue-Nile, to the Black-Nile and to the Omo-River. The locally known, Abay-wonz a main tributary of the Blue-Nile originates from Lake-Tana, as lakes are reservoirs, and they discharge an amount of the river proportional to intakes coming from inflowing streams, rivers and precipitations.

Since decade the Nile is at the centre of geo-political rivalry within the region, under the existing accord, Egypt has veto power over development projects over the Nile, but upstream countries say they should not be bound by unfair British colonial era pacts. Since the Nile is an international cross-border river, no country can justify sole ownership or an equitable use of its waters and efforts aimed at having in place agreements for equitable and fair use of this resource are of crucial importance. An arrangement which is known to be based on the British colonial interests favouring especially Egypt & the Sudan is unjust and unfair and is not legally binding, the parties much related to the Nile can not be bound by it. Egypt and the Sudan can exploit Ethiopia's current weak position or absence to retain or secure the former colonial treaties of 1929 and 1959 on the use of the Nile waters, for example the first treaty on Nile-sharing was signed b/n Great Britain and Egypt in 1929 granted the Sudan 4 bln cubic metres of water while 48 bln cubic metres of water granted to Egypt alone, the second water-sharing treaty of 1959, granted the Sudan 18.5 bln cubic metres of water while 55.5 bln cubic metres of water given to Egypt alone, meaning that one-fourth for Sudan and three-fourth for Egypt excluding headwater countries. As stated above, these treaties are known to favour only Egypt and has remained contentious, for this reason, Egypt's direct and indirect hand, through other fellow Arab states to
distabilise Ethiopia is known to be connected to the Nile issue. Ethiopia is not only the source of most of the waters of the Nile but almost all of the fertile and rich soil making particularly significant contributions to Egyptian agriculture.

The Nile has played a significant role in the emergence and growth of the ancient Egyptian civilization and is the lifeline of the present day Egypt. The late president Anwar El-Sadat quoted as saying in 1980, "If Ethiopia takes any action to block our right to the Nile waters, there will be no alternative for us but to use force, tampering with the rights of a nation to water is tampering with it's life and a decision to go to war on this score is indisputable in the international community". Various expeditions were launched to find the source of the Nile, thus a lot is at stake in the Nile issue. The Egyptians use of the Nile reached at 95% while the Sudan's use of the Nile reached at 77%, believed the Blue-Nile contributes approximately 80 to 85% of the Nile river discharge and 96% of the transported sediment carried by the Nile originates in Ethiopia with 59% of the water from the Blue-Nile, the rest being from Tekeze, Atbara, Sobat, and small tributaries. The erosion and transportation of silt only occurs during the Ethiopian rainy season in the summer, when rainfall is especially high on the Ethiopian plateaus. Egypt maintains it's heavy utilization for various projects, wasting over 20% of the water, (it's more than what all up-stream countries demand to use) due to inefficient dams built in the desert. For Ethiopia, if there is a single war worth sacrificing the blood of it's children, it is the fight to break-open Egypt's century-old blockade of the Nile river. In Ethiopia, it is long held conventional wisdom that Egypt is directly or indirectly behind most domestic, regional and international crisis situation affecting Ethiopia at any given time. Ethiopian empires and regimes have for long pointed-out gross Egyptian interference including among others that Egypt. Attempts and often has succeeded in blocking or modifying Ethiopian requests and interaction with international financial institutions: provides political, diplomatic and operational support to virtually any group organised against the Ethiopia: holds as a strategic objectives to do what ever it takes to keep Ethiopia poor, weak and divided: Egypt greatly resents any sign of Ethiopian influence in the region in Somalia, Djibouti, the Sudan and Yemen: At it's heart Egypt, where suspicions about former enemies and tensions with an old-age civilization reveal deep seated fears about water scarcity and losing control of the river. For such a reason, Egypt interferes in Ethiopia's relations with the Arab world too. Year after year, lacking technical, financial, and most importantly determined leadership, Ethiopian farmers watch as the rainfall washes their fertile soil away and gives it to Egypt,
thus there has always been basis for popular resentment and anger towards Egypt for it's unjust use of the Nile. The above riperian as well as the down-stream countries of the Nile need to work-out and accept a fair and just agreement for the equitable and sustainable use of the Nile waters. Egypt, which have been struggling to keep Ethiopia landlocked, it's strategic motive is expressed constantly by its politicians, has been to keep Ethiopia, which is vastly more fertile than Egypt and which controls the headwaters of the Blue-Nile, which provides Egypt and the Sudan with most of it's waters from posing a strategic threat to Egypt by potentially, cutting-off the flow of Blue-Nile waters & it's tributaries. Destabilising and weakening successive Ethiopian governments has been Egypt's most efficiently exploited strategy to protect it's monopolistic use of the Nile water. Cognizant of the internal contradictions and historical animosities among various Ethiopian constituencies. In 1979 Egyptian President Anwar El-Sadat threatened war on violators of what he saw as his country’s rights to Nile waters. Upriver countries Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania argue that they too need the water that originates on their lands.

Egypt has often supported rebel groups fighting against Ethiopian rulers, this support has been both direct and indirect, in the past it armed the Eritrean secessionist movements, with continuous training, sanctuary in the Sudan, even until the EPLF itself making a significant challenge to the Sudanese government, and the Tigrean rebels, backed the Oromo & Somali-insurgents in Ethiopia, and also supported former President Siad Barre’s invasion of Ethiopia in the summer of 1977, reportedly there was even a plan to resettle millions of Egyptians in Somalia in order to counter-balance Ethiopia's growing population. Ethiopia has also alleged that Egypt took sides with Eritrean regime during the 1998 to 2000 border conflict. There is little doubt that Egypt has been using Eritrea to channel it's support for various Ethiopian and Somali insurgents. This pointedly, also, meant that Egypt supported a policy of "constraining the headwaterland or by weakening Ethiopia", by any means from easy access to the Red Sea, which Ethiopia had once been dominated at it's lower reaches, through the ex-Ethiopian Naval Force. And many believed, this Egyptian strategy has been fruitful given the unfortunate fact that every Ethiopian ruler has relied heavily on violent suppression of dissent, and the implementation of policies that favours one ethnic-group over the other, thus creating favourable domestic conditions for armed insurgency. The revised agreement signed Burundi Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and Rwanda have signed the treaty so far, to plans allow irrigation and hydro-electric projects to go ahead without Egypt's consent, the Congo has to
sign within a year period in an attempt to end Egypt's historical control over the Nile's water. Ethiopia is the biggest source of the Blue-Nile waters contributing over 85% of it although Egypt and Sudan benefit from more than 90% of the water resource as a hangover from colonial era agreement. As still there is tension among Egypt and the Nile Basin Initiative countries with the North African state refusing to sign onto a new agreement made by the other members. It has to be recalled that the four Nile-upstream countries led by Ethiopia, signed in May, 2010 to a new treaty in Entebe, Uganda, seeking a more equitable water-sharing agreement.

Under the original Nile-water sharing-agreement, Egypt is facing water shortages by 2017, is entitled to 55.5 billion cubic meters a year from the Nile's total flow of around 84 billion cubic meters, some 86% of the waters originate in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government had commissioned an independent survey that proved the new Mega-dam would benefit both Egypt and the Sudan by decreasing siltation in their irrigation projects and by reducing water wastage, some scientific overviews have been conducted by the US Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, 1964, Land and water resources of the Blue-Nile Basin: Ethiopia. And recently by a committee endorsed by Egypt itself, in 2008 and 2010, according to these last surveys, Egypt and the Sudan could greatly benefit from the Mega-dam's energy production. Ethiopia denies Egypt an access to examine a new Mega-dam it intends to build on the Nile unless Cairo links a new deal relinquishing it's veto-powers over allocation of the river's water, said it would not agree to an Egyptian demand to see plans for the proposed dam unless Egypt joined the new Nile-cooperative framework agreement, signed by six-upstream countries which gives this option only signatories countries namely, Burundi, the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda whose have banded together to rewrite the 1959 water-sharing treaty that favours Egypt only. Egypt has been locked-up for more than a decade in a dispute with other countries through which the river passes, refusing changes to colonial-era treaties contested by Ethiopia and other upstream nations. After decades of strong population growth, it's to be recalled that Ethiopia has overtaken Egypt as Africa's second most numerous nation. The total population of the upstream countries estimated 270 million against 130 million for the down-stream duo of Egypt, 85 million and the Sudan, 45 million, whose 14 million southern Sudanese will soon be independent State and are being courted by both sides.
In recent years the Ethiopian prime minister have told lawmakers, "Ethiopia has been more willing to go it alone, announces numerous plans to erect water-dams for irrigation and electricity along the Nile", which it has angered the Egyptians, who demand a lions share of the water since the British colonial era treaties. "Eritrea has been training and deploying the Somali Al-Qaida affiliated Al-Shaabab and others home-grown destructive forces to terrorize our country, but Egypt is the direct force behind these destructive elements in order to dissuade the nation from developing its Nile-waters, and he called on "the Egyptians to realise that Ethiopia is not their enemy, Ethiopia's plan to build a major-dam on the Nile will also benefit the down stream countries, we want the Egyptian people to realise that we do not want to hurt them" he said. Ethiopia has plans to use it's Nile waters for agricultural projects, says it would be forced to finance the mega-dam from it's own coffers and from the sale of government bonds because Egypt was pressuring donor-countries and international financiers not to fund it's dam projects. Egypt feels such projects would threaten it's water supply, and point-out that they don't benefit from rains like the upstream-countries. The Ethiopian premier has quoted as saying "Egypt will not be able to stop Ethiopia from building Dam or irrigation schemes on the Nile. That is history--and that will not be part of the solution--Ethiopia is able and willing to use it's own resources to build dams on the Nile, and claims never seek any kind of permission from any side. The way forward is to seek a win-win solution through diplomatic efforts, not for Egypt to try and stop the unstoppable". Ethiopia has a hydro-power potential of 45, 000 Megawatts (MW), the second-largest capacity in Africa after the Congo, according to the World Bank. Ethiopia says the new military government in Egypt is moving to build better relations with Ethiopia. In May, 2011, Egypt had sent a 48-members popular public-diplomacy delegation to pave a new approach and smooth it's relations with Ethiopia and other Nile-upstream countries on their long standing dispute over the Nile-waters. A week later, the new Egyptian prime minister, Essam Sharaf arrived in Ethiopia where he held talks with senior Ethiopian government officials to mark a new chapter of cooperation between the two countries. His visit was welcomed by Ethiopian authorities as a major step toward in solving their differences over the Nile-water. The two are looking to put past disagreements over the use of the Nile-waters behind them after the Ethiopian premier has recently visited Cairo to discuss the two counties future relations, water was a top subject discussed on the agenda. It was the first to Egypt by the Thiopian premier since a poular uprising toppled the former government of Mohammed Hosni Mubarak in February, 2011. During
Hosni Mubarak's time in office, Ethiopia and Egypt had long disputed water-sharing along the Nile. But noted hydrologists fear "Ethiopia is offering Egypt and the Sudan to create a trilateral team of technical experts committee to manage the Nile-water crisis, and review of the dam that is being built inside Ethiopia. This will of course serve more the Egyptians, since the committee would evaluate reviving the centennial dam project and it's effect. It's a critical breakthrough on the issue. But noted hydrologists still in a fear "a head waterland offering Egypt and the Sudan an olive-branch in their bitter dispute over sharing the waters of the Nile-River, such offer include a possible joint ownership of huge Ethiopian hydro-power projects that Egypt has trying to block" saying that, "how a mindful premier can offer an olive-branch in ownership for countries those have been bitter enemies of the nation since time immemorial because of the Blue-Nile where this dam is going to be constructed? Others claim reservation on such focal issue, saying "be opponents or propponents of the ruling-EPRDF government, now every citizen believes that there are no convincing reasons not to support such construction of a Mega-dam on the River-Nile at this juncture, which could benefit majority Ethiopians and be a symbol of national pride and patriotism. However, agricultural lands in densely populated areas of the highlands has deteriorated alarmingly and markedly over recent decades. Deforestation and Soil erosion are most problematic in the marginal areas of subsistence agriculture.

The government has made substantial investments in the Hydro-power sector including the building of a number of dams. In a push for development, Ethiopia will build one of Africa’s largest hydro-power dams in the Omo River that flows into Lake Turkana and provides 90 per-cent of its water. For instance, the Fincha Power Station is a hydroelectric power plant of the Omo River in Ethiopia. It has a power generating capacity of 100 MW enough to power over 66,900 homes. The USD 2 billion dollar dam called Gibe III is said to nearly double the East African nation’s power capacity and transform it's southern wilderness into highly productive cultivated farmlands, irrigated by the dam’s regulated outflow. According to the Ethiopian government, the dam will develop the region and end a “backward lifestyle” in the area, transforming it's southern wilderness into a highly productive cultivated farmland, irrigated by the dam’s regulated outflow. It says that domestic and foreign investors will grow sugarcane and other cash crops on a large-scale in the south, an area known for its numerous indigenous tribes. Ethiopia's government has determined on a massive dam-building project, which it hopes will generate alternative sources of power and also help to turn the country’s economy around. But
the idea is not without controversy, and critics have said the endeavour will be an environmental disaster. Ethiopia became more determined to push massive development of roads, bridges and dams with the considerable assistance of Chinese loans and expertise. With a series of new hydro-electric dams coming online, Ethiopia wants to become this corner of Africa's hydro-electric power center. China's role in funding Ethiopian dam draws ire' Ethiopia says construction of a dam along the Omo River will create needed electrical power for itself and Kenya, and channel water for food production. Environmentalists worry it could drain a Kenyan desert lake central to people's livelihoods. Nairobi, Keny Kenyan environmental activists want the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China to hold off on a promise to invest $500 million in Ethiopia’s $1.7 billion Gibe III Hydro-electric Dam, which they say threatens Lake Turkana – the world's largest permanent desert lake, and a crucial source of water for half a million people. The controversial dam is being built on the Omo River in eastern Ethiopia, which supplies the lake in northwestern Kenya with 90 per of its water. Once completed, the dam will affect the livelihoods of some 200,000 in the river valley and 300,000 more near the lake, the activists warn. Friends of Lake Turkana – a Kenyan organization representing indigenous communities in northwestern Kenya whose livelihood depend mainly on the lake – had earlier estimated that that Gibe III could shrink the lake, which straddles the Kenyan-Ethiopian border, by 10 meters (about 30 feet). This could cause an increase in salinity in the lake’s water, making it undrinkable for indigenous groups who live around the lake with their animals. Recently, resource-related conflicts have ignited between the nomadic pastoralist communities, and are expected to increase if the dam is completed. “Lake Turkana is home to large number of some of the most massive Nile crocodiles, hippos, and other large animals, all which would find it hard to survive without the lake,” said Dr. Richard Leakey, a renowned Kenyan conservationist and paleoanthropologist. There are also a wide variety of unique birds and other wildlife all of which would find it hard to survive without the lake or if the water nutrients were to change as drastically as studies have predicated will happen if Gibe III is successfully completed, according to the groups. The lake's survival hangs in the balance as China decides whether to fund the dam project, says Ikal Angelei, founder of Friends of Lake Turkana and the winner of the 2012 Goldman Environment Prize for Africa. “The lake is in the danger of drying unless the Kenyan government and international agencies step in to stop the unsustainable development both within and outside Kenya,” said Ms. Angelei at a news conference in Nairobi. “While many would-be financiers have withdrawn, China still
holds [to its] promise,” she added. But according to opposition politicians, someone has to note well that the Ethiopian government is not democratic or democratically elected: but the election of EPRDF by 99.6% is not a sign of democracy, undoutedly a one-party rule. In 2010: Egypt discussed taking military action in cooperation with Sudan against Ethiopia to protect their stake in Nile River, according to internal emails from the U.S. private-security firm Stratfor. Water wars in the Middle East and North Africa are not uncommon. Then-King Hussein bin Talal of the (normally docile) Jordan said in 1994 when he officially recognized Israel that “he would not go to war with Israel again except over water.”

Egypt - The Nile & The Aswan High Dam (Lake Nasser’)

Al-Sadd al-ʿĀlī rockfill dam Arabic meaning for "Aswan High Dam" across the Nile River, at Aswān, Egypt, completed in 1970 (and formally inaugurated in January 1971) at a cost of about $1 billion. The dam, 364 feet (111 meters) high, with a crest length of 12,562 feet (3,830 meters) and a volume of 57,940,000 cubic yards (44,300,000 cubic meters), impounds a reservoir, Lake Nasser, that has a gross capacity of 5.97 trillion cubic feet (169 billion cubic meters). Of the Nile’s total annual discharge, some 2.6 trillion cubic feet (74 billion cubic meters) of water have been allocated by treaty between Egypt and Sudan, with about 1.96 trillion cubic feet (55.5 billion cubic meters) apportioned to Egypt and the remainder to Sudan. Lake Nasser backs up the Nile about 200 miles (320 km) in Egypt and almost 100 miles (160 km) farther upstream (south) in Sudan: creation of the reservoir necessitated the costly relocation of the ancient Egyptian temple complex of Abu Simbel, which would otherwise have been submerged. Ninety thousand Egyptian fellahin (peasants) and Sudanese Nubian nomads had to be relocated. Fifty thousand Egyptians were transported to the Kawm Umbū valley, 30 miles (50 km) north of Aswān, to form a new agricultural zone called Nubaria, and most of the Sudanese were resettled around Khashm al-Qirbah, Sudan. The Aswan High Dam yields enormous benefits to the economy of Egypt. For the first time in history, the annual Nile flood can be controlled by man. The dam impounds the floodwaters, releasing them when needed to maximize their utility on irrigated land, to water hundreds of thousands of new acres, to improve navigation both above and below Aswān, and to generate enormous amounts of electric power (the dam’s 12 turbines can generate 10 billion kilowatt-hours annually). The reservoir, which has a depth of 300 feet (90 meters) and averages 14 miles (22 km) in width, supports a fishing industry. The Aswan High Dam has produced several negative side effects, however, chief of which is a gradual decrease in the fertility and
hence the productivity of Egypt’s riverside agricultural lands. This is because of the dam’s complete control of the Nile’s annual flooding. Much of the flood and its load of rich fertilizing silt is now impounded in reservoirs and canals: the silt is thus no longer deposited by the Nile’s rising waters on farmlands. Egypt’s annual application of about 1 million tons of artificial fertilizers is an inadequate substitute for the 40 million tons of silt formerly deposited annually by the Nile flood. Completed in 1902, with its crest raised in 1912 and 1933, an earlier dam 4 miles (6 km) downstream from the Aswan High Dam holds back about 174.2 billion cubic feet (4.9 billion cubic meters) of water from the tail of the Nile flood in the late autumn. Once one of the largest dams in the world, it is 7,027 feet (2,142 meters) long and is pierced by 180 sluices that formerly passed the whole Nile flood, with its heavy load of silt.

In the beginning, Egypt was the Nile. That could now change, as Egypt, Sudan and the countries that supply the Nile's waters face new politics, economic development, skyrocketing demographics and climate change. Egypt confronts at least a half a dozen other African countries that have for generations delivered their waters to Egypt’s Nile.

NILE - Egypt and the Sudan under the Anglo-Egyptian joint rule, by the British’

In 1929 when Egypt and the Sudan were under the Anglo-Egyptian joint rule, by the British, they were awarded rights up to 75% of the Nile's flow, the up-stream countries were not allocated a share. In 1959, that ruling was up-held with added stipulation that all Nile basin countries were required to secure Cairo's approval for any project that involved Nile waters. The Egyptians have allegedly refused to relinquish any of that to Ethiopia and the other up-stream countries namely Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda. The above states, which claim the 1929 treaty is vestige of colonialism, are demanding more water because of burgeoning populations and the pressing need for greater food production and hydro-electric power. In May, 2010 , due to the ever-increasing water & energy consumption, the up-stream countries established the "River-Nile Basin Cooperative Framework", to work toward fairer water sharing. It was ratified by Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda, Burundi and the Congo have not signed the agreement, the signatories gave the other Nile states a year to join the pact before putting it into action. Egypt and the Sudan were stunned and refused to sign, exacerabting tensions b/n them and the non-Arab African states. Egypt accuse the up-stream countries of misusing the Nile. The
referendum in southern Sudan is generally expected to result in the creation of a new state there, and Egypt seeking to build relations with the southern-Sudanese leaders, but on the Nile issue it's possible they could align with their African neighbors to the south rather than Khartoum or Cairo, against whom the south fought a civil-war over three decades that ended in 2005. That would strengthen the hands of Egypt's Nile rivals, who are determined to force Cairo & Khartoum to give up some of their share of the Nile's water. As a result, the making of war threats to Egypt over the right to use the Blue-Nile has been an established form of propaganda used by successive rulers of Ethiopia in order to gain populist support, but why were any of the Ethiopian leaders unable to live-up to their promises of utilizing the Nile for the benefit of their country, despite the paramount need for and popular public support of this cause? War has been the most common means by which disputes over natural resources between countries are resolved.

It's often said that Egypt and Ethiopia could go to war, in the event that Ethiopia decides to reduce the quality and quantity of the Nile-waters, yet, despite intense rhetorical exchanges, neither country ever seriously considered war as an option. It's true that Egypt will never contemplate invading Ethiopia, but not because of they are scared of military defeat as alludes to. For the Egyptians waging military confrontation with a country that is thousand of miles away, and does not share a border is simply impractical, the one tactic often floated by the Egyptians is to bomb any dam Ethiopia constructs on the river, suspected it's also a bluff, the cost of such action would out-weigh any potential benefit as Ethiopia would most certainly respond by bombing the Egyptian dams, causing catastrophic damage that could potentially wipe-out Egypt as known. However, the Egyptians rely on other more advantageous strategies to counter Ethiopia's ambition and preemptively disable it's ability to temper the waters flow. 1, ECONOMIC: by blocking Ethiopia from raising the funds needed to develop projects. 2, LEGAL: by foreclosing future use of the river by developing projects before the up-stream countries and asserting prior usage. 3, SECURITY: by destabilizing Ethiopia through strategic and material support for insurgent groups. Egypt which have been struggling to keep the headwater land landlocked & keep the flow of Nile to Egypt & the Mediterranean, Egypt's strategic motive, expressed constantly, has been to keep Ethiopia, the headwater land which is vastly more fertile than Egypt and which controls the headwaters of the Blue-Nile, which provides Egypt and the Sudan with most of it's water from posing a strategic threat to Egypt by potentially cutting-off the flow of Blue-Nile waters.
As a strategic motive, Egypt pointedly, would rather have chaos on the horn of Africa so that it could be the master of the Suez-canal & Red sea strategic location all the way through the Bab-el-Mandaab adjacent to Somaliland, at the entrance to the Indian ocean. The expected break-up of the Sudan, Egypt's southern neighbor and it's ally in the Nile dispute, next January following a referendum on southern independence will further complicate an already complex quarrel over a dwindling resource. Egypt and the Sudan have been locked in more than a decade of dispute with Ethiopia, the source of the Blue-Nile, and six other states through which the Nile passes over a more equitable sharing of the great river's water. Of course, the importance of the Nile to Egypt can not be underestimated and the country is justifiably nervous whenever it feels this vital life line is under threat, Egypt therefore has all along clung feverishly to a now obsolete claim of exclusive rights to Nile waters. It has alienated source countries Ethiopia, Uganda, Burundi as well as the riparian countries, all of which believe that they are also legally entitled to their rightful shares of the Nile. Egypt's economy, despite relatively steady, growth for several years is still sluggish, poverty is widespread, unemployment is estimated as high as 40 % and earnings from Egypt's rapidly dwindling reserves of hydro-carbons will soon to end. The High-Aswan Dam is so silted-up that it currently holds just 21% installed capacity. As a result, farmlands in lower-Egypt require increasingly massive amounts of fertilizer. The reason the dam and Lake-Nasser retain the rich Ethiopian soil as silt, resulting in the degradation of 90% of Egypt's farmland, land that had been regularly and unfailingly replenished for thousands of years until 1971 when the High-Aswan dam was built despite authoritative advice to the contrary. Furthermore, Egypt's population is growing at the rate of 2.5 million a year, adding even more pressure on an overburdened system. Over 98% of Egypt's 83 million people are settled along both sides of the 883 km long Nile-valley. Of the Egypt's 1,001, 430 over 950,000 Square kms lies outside this barely 30 km wide strip of fertile real estate which amounts to less than half of Djibouti's total land area of 23,000 Square Kms.

The recent announcement by the Ethiopian PM to build a massive-dam for hydro-electric power on the Nile-River, has been received by Egyptian government as a grave threat to the country's survival so much so that the Egyptian military has been instructed to make preparation for any possible challenge, the Nile-dam project is an attempt to cause a regional instability that is intended to divert-attention of the people of Ethiopia, not to rise-up against his regime. Egypt has reiterated it's opposition to Ethiopia's plans to build a dam on it's Nile-waters raising concerns about
water supply in Cairo. Egypt to make itself heard, a 40-members Egyptian
dlegation visited Nile-riparian states, seeking cooperation in opposing
Addis Ababa's Grand-Millennium Dam construction in Benshangul-Gumuz
region 40 km from the Sudan-border. In it's opposition to Ethiopia's
construction of the mega- hydropower plant on the Nile-River, about 40
km from Sudan, Egypt requested Ethiopia to allow it to conduct technical
and environmental studies on the proposed dam to determine it's
repercussions on the Nile-waters quota. However, Ethiopia has rejected
the Egyptian request, saying it is not a member of the Entebbe, Uganda
treaty and that any question on the project must come through the
cooperative Framework Agreement. Unfazed by Egyptian threats, Ethiopia
has intimated it's intention to construct a number of small projects on it's
Nile-waters, beside the Grand Millennium-Dam which would generate
nearly 6,000 MW electricity. Ethiopia has already made it's intention clear
on-going ahead with the project, saying that the Mega-hydropower project
is critical in addressing the country's severe energy Paucity. The project
would also help the country realize it's desire to become one of the key
electricity exporters in the region.

The Ethiopian PM had said last week that the new dam will only benefit all
parties, including Egypt. He said Egypt is continuing it's longstanding
policy of preventing Ethiopian development along the Nile-waters. He even
went so far as accusing Egypt of collaborating with anti-Ethiopian
elements over the years to promote this cause. Egypt has since been
opposing the Entebbe Agreement, which calls for redistribution of
historical Nile-water quotas. Egypt complains that it's share of Nile-waters
dramatically reduce if a dam is constructed. Egypt and the Sudan have not
ratified the Entebbe treaty. Egypt has virtually held monopoly over the
Nile-waters as per the 1929 colonial treaty with Great Britain, which gave
Egypt veto-rights over all upstream projects. In 1959 Egypt signed a deal
with Sudan, which allowed both countries 90% of the share of the Nile-
waters. However, recently, Nile-basin countries comprising Ethiopia,
Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya and Burundi signed a separate
agreement to end Egypt's historical control over the River-Nile waters.
Once respective parliaments of these countries ratify the agreement these
countries would not be required to seek Egypt's approval before
implementing irrigation and hydro-power projects on the Nile-waters.
Another blow to Egyptian influence on the Nile-waters came in the form of
a "Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed b/n Economic community
of the Great Lakes countries and the Nile-basin Initiative, which seeks to
facilitate cooperation for sustainable development and efficient water
resources management in the region.
The other important numbers facing Egypt and it's upstream neighbors are the average annual flows into Lake Nasser. The total is 85 billion cubic meters per year. Egypt uses approximately 55.5 billion cubic meters, and some say that in years of high rainfall, Egypt has used more than their share. Sudan, prior to South the Sudan’s independence typically used 18.5 billion cubic meters. The remaining 10 billion evaporates on the way to or in Lake Nasser. The upstream basin member countries have already taken their share before it reaches Lake Nasser but population growth, economic development and climate change are affecting all members of the basin. Today Egypt has a population of 85 million, Sudan has a population of about 48 million, and Ethiopia has a population of 88 million. Between these three countries the population has increased four times and in recent years Egypt has succeeded in increasing by 25% it's inventory of farmlands by irrigating deserts through extensive and expensive canal systems. What historically appeared to be Egypt's birthright has now become a privilege the must negotiate with their upstream neighbors. It's a major issue in Egypt's upcoming elections.

Egypt and the Grand Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia’

Preliminary construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GRD) began in April 2011 on the Blue Nile River near the Sudanese border. Scheduled for completion in 2014, it is planned to be the biggest hydropower dam in Africa, with more than twice the generating capacity of the Aswan High Dam. But long before the completion date, the project is already generating significant concern amongst the nine other countries that share the Nile, especially Egypt. Over the past century many treaties have been signed in an attempt to assure each riparian country a right to Nile water, with Egypt generally receiving the lion’s share. But sub-Saharan African counties have long argued that the old treaties deny their modern right to livelihood, and after a decade of political to-and-fro between these countries and Egypt, the GRD is now underway. Most recently, the Egyptian government protested that no quantitative studies have been conducted with regard to the dam’s effects, a complaint that resulted in a trilateral ministerial meeting being held in November between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan. During this meeting, it was announced that an independent technical committee of experts from each country would be formed in six months time to produce such a study. But at the same meeting, Alemayehu Tegenu, the Ethiopian minister of water and energy, declared that regardless of the study’s outcome, the construction of the dam will continue unabated due to high confidence that the GRD will ultimately benefit all parties. Adel Darwish, a British
journalist and historian who co-wrote the 1994 book “Water Wars: Coming Conflicts in the Middle East,” told Egypt Independent that Egypt never should have ruled out the option of military intervention, because the stakes are so high for the country’s livelihood.

EU Needs To Help Stem Regional Water Conflicts'

European governments must wield their influence and engineering skills more effectively to prevent conflicts over water supply that could threaten global security, the European Union's policy chief Catherine Ashton said. European governments must wield their influence and engineering skills more effectively to prevent conflicts over water supply that could threaten global security, the European Union's policy chief Catherine Ashton said.

The EU has a strategic interest in ensuring stability in regions with some of the world's biggest water problems, including North Africa after the Arab Spring revolts and Central Asia which holds crucial energy reserves. Ashton said the Nile basin was a particular concern. "If managed well, the Nile holds the potential to catalyze regional integration and to help bring prosperity and stability to a vast area," she said in written responses received late on Friday to Reuters' questions. "If handled poorly, each of the Nile countries could feel the negative consequences in their economic and social development."

Along the Nile, growing demand for water due to population growth, foreign investment and climate change pits Egypt's new government against upstream states such as South Sudan, Ethiopia and Rwanda, who are frustrated by what they see as Cairo's disproportionately large share of the river's water. In central Asia, one of the world's driest places, poor Soviet-era planning has left countries heavily dependent on thirsty crops such as cotton and grain, leading to tensions over water use and dam construction. Uzbek President Islam Karimov said on Friday a dispute over water resources risks provoking military conflict in the former Soviet region. Ashton, who was hosting a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Cyprus where water security was discussed, said the bloc would offer its know-how in order to help calm tensions in the region.

"Central Asia's ... increasing demand on a limited, shared resource carries risks but also opportunities for cooperation in the entire region and we will continue our efforts to help the region in this direction," she said. With the world population predicted to grow to more than 9 billion in 2050, from 7 billion, demand for food is expected to increase by 70 percent in the next four decades, United Nations forecasts show, putting unprecedented strain
on water resources. "Water shortages, poor water quality, droughts and floods are likely to affect many places ... over the next few years and this can lead to instability and insecurity, which could have a direct bearing on Europe," Ashton said.

Experts say the European Union could help water-starved countries in North Africa better manage their water usage, helping address criticism that Europe has not reacted effectively to challenges stemming from the Arab Spring. "Where the EU may have a role to play is in the area of water sustainability, reuse of water waste," said William Lawrence, North Africa Project Director at the International Crisis Group. "If downstream countries are using less water and using it better, then this can address upstream politics, which can be cantankerous." (September 8, 2012)

The Nile - Egypt's lifeline in the desert, comes under threat'

Poor African capitals are increasingly challenging Cairo for the river's water, without which Egypt's economy would wither and die. Overwhelmed by cascading economic and political problems since the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, this nation teeters from within even as it biggest threat may lie hundreds of miles away in the African highlands. Buried in the headlines is the future of the Nile River — and thus the fate of Egypt itself. Mubarak long neglected the security danger posed by other nations' claims to the timeless pulse that provides 95% of this desert country's water, without which its delta farmlands would wither and its economy die. As poor African capitals increasingly challenge Cairo, however, the struggle has become one of the most pressing foreign policy tests for Egypt's new president, Mohammed Mursi. African countries at the river's source, notably Ethiopia, no longer feel bound by colonial-era agreements on water rights and are moving to siphon away larger shares of water for electricity, irrigation and business to meet demands of burgeoning populations. It is a skirmish involving diplomats, engineers and veiled threats of war over geography's blessings and slights and how nations in a new century will divvy up a river on whose banks civilizations have risen and tumbled. "All of Egyptian life is based on the Nile. Without it there is nothing," said Moujahed Achouri, the representative for the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization in Egypt. Morsi's acknowledgment of the water crisis and his desire to reach a compromise to protect his country's strategic and historical claim is evident: The Islamist leader has visited key Nile countries twice since his inauguration in June, and his prime minister, Hesham Kandil, is a former water and irrigation minister with connections to officials in African governments. An
Egyptian delegation recently toured the region, listening to how Cairo might help build hospitals and schools in villages and jungles. An advisor to the president quoted in Al Ahram Weekly said this of Morsi: "The man was shocked when he received a review about the state of ties we have with Nile basin countries. The previous regime should be tried for overlooking such a strategic interest." For decades, Egypt had concentrated on problems closer to home, including keeping the Arab-Israeli peace and tending to wars from Lebanon to Iraq. Mubarak, who survived a 1995 assassination attempt by Islamic extremists in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, had paid little attention to East Africa. But his regime was adamant — at one point hinting at military action — in preserving the existing Nile treaties. That echoed a warning from his predecessor, President Anwar Sadat, in 1979: "The only matter that could take Egypt to war again is water." In a 1929 treaty and through other pacts, Egypt and its southern neighbor, Sudan, were granted the bulk of the Nile's flow. The logic — filtered through decades of politics and power struggles — was that Egypt could not survive without the river. Nile basin countries, including Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, have seasonal rains and other water sources. But economic pressure and increasing demand for energy and development have turned African countries' attention to the Nile. Since 2010, Ethiopia, which now gets only 3% of its water from the Nile, and five other upstream countries have indicated they would divert more water and no longer honor Egypt's veto power over building projects on the river. The biggest challenge to Cairo is the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Experts estimate that the hydropower project, which is under construction and is expected to cost at least $4.8 billion, could reduce the river's flow to Egypt by as much as 25% during the three years it would take to fill the reservoir behind the dam. The project faces a number of potential setbacks and lost its biggest proponent when Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi died in August. Ethiopia has sought to reassure Cairo that Egypt's annual share of 55.5 billion cubic meters of Nile water — about two-thirds of the river's flow — will not be disrupted and that the new dam may provide low-cost electricity to its neighbors. But the Egyptians are suspicious. "Egypt has entered a stage where its resources are depleting and population is rapidly increasing," said Hani Raslan, an expert on the Nile basin for Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo. "If the dam is complete ... this will mean Ethiopia will turn into an enemy for Egypt because it will essentially threaten the country's safety, development and livelihood of its people." He added, "Egypt would legally have the right to defend itself by going to war." The struggle over the river highlights decades of strained
relations. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni was quoted as saying before Morsi’s visit in October: "Despite the Nile River supporting livelihoods of millions of Egyptians from the ancient times to date, none of the country’s presidents has ever visited Uganda to see the source of this lifeline." Egypt and the other Nile nations are seeking to calm the rhetoric. Officials say a resolution may include Cairo entering into long-term economic and energy resource agreements with neighboring capitals. The Egyptian delegation that recently toured the region included doctors and representatives of food banks, hospitals and charities. Egypt, however, faces deep economic problems and is trying to attract foreign investment, which dropped sharply during last year’s uprising and ensuing political unrest. "Morsi is trying to send signals to the African world that Egypt is opening up now, that he wants to improve relations and increase cooperation," Raslan said. Morsi’s visits to Africa "are all just gestures." "No real agreements have been reached yet," he said. "More needs to be done. Egypt wants and needs to reach its influence in the region." The essence of the Nile conflict is poor nations — Egypt and Ethiopia — needing the river for similar reasons. Ethiopia, which has experienced strong economic growth in recent years, wants to boost electricity output while spurring agriculture and development. Those needs also resonate to the north, but Egypt, which has no other water source, faces more dire prospects. The crisis is certain to force Egypt, where regulations are tangled in bureaucracy and often ignored, to improve water conservation among the nearly 30% of its population that depends on farming for its livelihood. Much of the Nile Delta is made up of small family farms that for centuries have grown wheat, corn and rice with little environmental concern. This attitude and a growing population, which may jump from 82 million to 150 million by 2050, have put further strains on the river. "Water policies in Egypt have to be long-range," said Achouri, the U.N. official. "If you want farmers to stop using too much water for irrigation, alternatives and other incentives should be made available to them. Farmers right now cannot make a living without the Nile." A possible solution is rotating away from water-intensive crops, such as rice, and shifting to increased wheat production. Egypt, where the word "bread" also means "life," is the world’s No. 1 importer of wheat. Agricultural experts say reducing rice production while increasing wheat yields would conserve water and meet the country’s food needs. Such a scenario may be forced upon farmers if the Nile’s flow is curtailed and irrigation canals become parched. Egypt’s water and irrigation minister, Mohamed Bahaa El Din Saad, said recently that overpopulation, farming and other water. Source: Los Angeles Times by Jeffrey Fleishman, (November 11, 2012)
Nile Project launches with its first major event in Aswan, Egypt’)

The Nile Project was founded in August 2011 by Egyptian ethnomusicologist Mina Girgis and Ethiopian-American singer Meklit Hadero to address the Nile basin’s cultural and environmental challenges using an innovative approach that combines music, education and an enterprise platform. The world’s longest river runs through 11 countries (Congo DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan and Egypt) and touches the lives of 400 million people. The Project’s mission is to connect the people of the Nile basin through a cultural dialogue that evokes Africa’s iconic river as a shared ecosystem. Initial crowd funding was secured by Mina and Meklit to embark on their reconnaissance journey across East Africa in May 2012, where they have engaged with musicians, development organizations and cultural institutions to take part in the Project and help shape its various programs. The first of these programs, the Nile Gathering, takes place at Fekra Cultural Centre in Aswan, Egypt, between 10 – 29 January 2013. The Gathering encompasses a four-day strategic planning workshop (10 – 14 January) that builds on the Project’s vision, followed by a two-week music residency (15 – 29 January) to develop music that can generate empathy and inspire cultural and environmental curiosity.

The workshop will bring together expertise in fields of environment, culture, agriculture, finance, education, development, nonviolent communication, cross-cultural dialogue, conflict resolution and intercultural learning. A team of Art of Hosting (see notes to editors) facilitators will engage participants in conversations that integrate their respective disciplinary and cultural perspectives and contribute to a common understanding of Nile issues. The outcomes will serve as blueprints for intercultural dialogues integral to the Project’s programs and activities. During the residency, musicians from the 11 Nile basin countries will collaborate to translate this intercultural dialogue into a new body of songs, drawn from the rich and diverse genres, traditions and instruments found in East Africa. Under the musical direction of Miles Jay (see notes to editors), the music residency will provide a space for the musicians to learn about one another and compose and record new music to be performed in Africa and around the world.

Nile Project programs: Nile Tour: using a boat made of recycled water bottles, a collective of Nile Project musicians and environmental educators will sail down the river, from the Mediterranean to Aswan in 35 days,
performing concerts complemented by participatory workshops where local audiences learn about the Nile’s cultural and environmental fabric.

Nile Stories: complementing the Nile Tour, this will be a web-based dialogue platform where Nile citizens can share their perspectives on the river through live conversations as well as short-format videos.

Nile Camps: annual summer camps for young musicians from the 11 Nile basin countries. During the day, they explore local ecosystems and in the evening, they express their learning through music.

Nile Curriculum: an educational initiative that offers a holistic approach to Nile river ecology and its inhabitants with a multidisciplinary curriculum exploring history, geography, cultures and ecosystems of the Nile basin.

TEDxNile: a conference featuring scientists, thinkers and artists with Nile-related ideas worth spreading. Nile Enterprise Platform/Nile Fellowship Program: this platform will channel newly acquired cultural and environmental understanding towards concrete action. Partnering with social enterprise organizations such as Ashoka (see notes to editors), the project will train and empower East African youth to develop innovative solutions that address social, cultural, environmental and economic challenges relevant to the Nile. Source: ER December 15, 2012.

Al-Ahram Weekly - Egypt, Ethiopia and the new GERD'

The Ethiopian dam project could constitute a threat to Egypt, but only if Ethiopia is pushed into going it alone, instead of being coaxed onto a different path by genuine cooperative aid.

Adel Amer writes:- Ethiopia has begun operations to divert a portion of the Blue Nile preparatory to the construction of a major dam. Although this project had been anticipated for many years and in spite of repeated assurances from Addis Ababa that it would not affect Egypt, the Ethiopian decision to commence operations triggered anger and alarm among Egyptian public opinion, reactions reminiscent of the Iraqi and Syrian responses to the Ataturk Dam project many years ago. The crisis over the diversion of the course of the Nile dates back to May 2010, when six upper riparian countries in the Nile Basin, meeting in Entebbe, signed a new Nile Waters Treaty, giving Cairo and Khartoum a year’s grace period to join. The Entebbe Treaty states that cooperation between the countries of the Nile Basin initiative is founded on the principle of fair and reasonable use on the part of the state parties. Recently, the signatory
states began ratification procedures through their parliaments. Once the treaty goes into effect, it will bring an end to Egypt and Sudan’s historic quotas under the 1929 and 1959 Nile Waters Agreements, in accordance with which Egypt obtained 55.5 billion cubic meters a year and Sudan 18.5 billion. The six countries that have signed the new treaty are Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. The Democratic Congo joined Egypt and Sudan’s refusal to sign. In March 2013, the newly independent South Sudan announced that it would join the treaty. Cairo and Khartoum have charged that the Entebbe Treaty “violates all international agreements” and vowed to alert donor nations to the illegality of funding any water projects on the Nile or its tributaries. They added that they would lobby against the Ethiopian dam project, in particular, which will cost an estimated $4.8 billion, according to the late Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Ethiopia and the other signatory countries were unfazed by such protests and warnings, and on 1 April 2011, Ethiopia formally inaugurated the Great Millennium Dam project, or the Renaissance Dam, for the production of hydroelectric power for the Benishangul-Gumuz region, which is adjacent to the Sudanese border. The dam, which is due to be completed in 2015, will create a reservoir of approximately 63 billion cubic meters of water.

Following the 25 January 2011 revolution, Egyptian popular leaders pressed the need to address this vital issue, stressing that it had to be handled objectively and in a spirit untainted by the “arrogance that had characterized the approach of the governments of former president Hosni Mubarak”. On 29 April 2011, a “people’s delegation”, consisting of representatives of the revolutionary youth, political parties and other public figures, set off to Addis to discuss the Millennium Dam project. Such actions inaugurated a new climate for handling dam initiatives and other issues related to the Nile waters. Perhaps because of this, Egyptians were all the more shocked by the Ethiopian announcement of its decision to press ahead with the diversion of the Blue Nile within hours of President Morsi’s visit to Addis Ababa to attend the African Summit. On the sidelines of this summit, Morsi met with Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and raised Egyptian concerns with respect to the dam. Experts on the joint Egyptian-Ethiopian-Sudanese committee on this project found that “the studies that the Ethiopian side had submitted with respect to the dam were insufficient to prove that its construction would not be harmful to Egypt.” In light of this, the tripartite committee will ask for additional studies, which will be undertaken by international experts on the committee. The committee is made up of six local members (two each from Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia) and four international experts on dam
engineering and hydrology, water resource management and the social, economic and environmental impact of dams.

The construction of the dam on the upper reaches of the Nile poses an enormous challenge to Egyptian agriculture. The consequent water shortage could lead to reduced domestic food production as well as to a reduction by approximately 500 kilowatts per year in the electricity generated by the High Dam and the Aswan Dam. Such a specter induced the Sudan and Nile Basin Studies Unit of Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies to convene a seminar on this question. It hosted Mohamed Allam, former minister of irrigation and water resources, who had been responsible for this issue during one of the tensest periods in Egyptian-Ethiopian relations over a number of essential differences regarding the dam. Allam presented a paper to the forum discussing the various phases of this question, from the Egyptian perspective in particular. By way of background, Allam underscored a number of weaknesses on the Egyptian side: the scientific and technological lag, the spread of corruption, the deterioration in public services, and economic, social and cultural underdevelopment. He also mentioned the decline in Egypt’s regional and international status and influence. At the same time, important political changes were taking place elsewhere in the Nile Basin. Ethiopia and Uganda were experiencing periods of economic growth and growing international support. In addition, Israeli influence in countries of the upper Nile Basin was increasing, while Egyptian influence remained minimal. Such factors contributed to augmenting the pressures on Egypt on one of its most crucial concerns, namely issues related to the Nile Basin initiative.

Water projects on the Blue Nile, whether in Ethiopian highlands or in Sudan, would have a major impact on Egypt, as the Blue Nile accounts for around 90 per cent of the water that reaches Egypt. Egypt is heavily dependent on the Nile for its water needs. As Allam pointed out in his paper, the Nile furnishes 55.5 billion cubic meters a year of water (under the current quota), while Egypt receives only a billion cubic meters a year in rainfall, which falls primarily on the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts and parts of the Sinai. There are subterranean water sources, but these are non-renewable. The subterranean reserve in the Western Desert permits for the extraction of no more than three to five billion cubic meters per year over the next 50 to 100 years. Meanwhile, the costs of desalinization are very high, and the quantities that this method supplies come to only 200 million cubic meters a year. According to Allam, Egypt’s current water needs amount to over 75 billion cubic meters a year, which
is about 30 per cent higher than the available resources. The deficit is made up for by recycling. The per capita share of water is only 700 cubic meters a year. However, by 2050, and given current population growth figures, per capita share of water will decline to 350 cubic meters per year. Water projects on the upper Nile would further imperil the situation. Large tracts of agricultural land would be lost. Hydroelectric power production would drop sharply and compel increasing reliance on gas-powered generators. Water purification plants and a number of other industries along the Nile would be severely affected, and the quality of irrigation water would deteriorate. In addition, there would be greater seepage of sea water into the northern coastal areas and the quality of the water in the northern freshwater lakes would decline.

TOWARDS A ROADMAP: Sudan and South Sudan are Egypt’s most important partners in the foreseeable future, said Allam. Both need Egyptian support, expertise and investment. They also have water resources that could increase the yield of the Nile, large tracts of land suitable for cultivation and livestock, and mineral wealth. In addition, they offer promising markets for emergent Egyptian industries and skilled Egyptian labor. Politically, their unification would undermine regional and international designs to set the two countries against each other to the detriment of them both. Clearly, they would be well advised to create a joint technical body to examine the potential effects of the Ethiopian barrages on them both and to review the results of the Egyptian-Sudanese studies that had been conducted on this matter in the interest of formulating a unified vision on the dams on the basis of the bilateral agreement of 1959 that governs the Egyptian-Sudanese relationship with respect to the Nile waters. In his paper, Allam also discussed why Ethiopia attaches such importance to the dam project. It has long been an Ethiopian dream to control the headwaters of the Blue Nile, he said. Ethiopia would reap huge profits from the export of hydroelectric power to neighboring countries, generating a major source of national revenue that would stimulate a qualitative leap in economic and social development, and enhance Addis Ababa’s influence in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere in the continent. The net profit from the production and export of the electricity from the Mandaya Dam alone exceeds $7 billion a year. The power — and hence income — generating capacity of the Renaissance Dam could be considerably greater. However, Addis also realized that these dams would not have this anticipated economic value unless they received the blessings of Egypt and Sudan, which would translate into the purchase of large quantities of the electricity they produce. Currently, Ethiopia, itself, does not have the domestic infrastructure or market
capable of consuming a major portion of the amount of electricity that could be generated, while the only two other major consumers would be Egypt and Sudan. Therefore, Egypt and Sudan’s refusal to participate in a network would delay Ethiopia’s ability to benefit economically from the dams, at least until it develops a sufficient infrastructure and market locally, which would take several decades.

Egypt’s regional and international drives concerning the Renaissance Dam project began in earnest in the middle of last year. Egypt rejected the feasibility studies for their failure to take into consideration the detrimental effects of this project on Sudan and Egypt. It sent its comments in this regard to the secretariat of the Nile Basin Initiative, to the technical bureau of the Eastern Nile Basin Commission, to the World Bank, to the European Market, to the Canadian Advisory Bureau, and to the Norwegian Consultancy Bureau that performed the feasibility and design studies for the project. It has also sustained talks with donor agencies and with China in order to drive home the severe detrimental repercussions of the dam on both Egypt and Sudan. In the course of these talks, Egyptian officials stressed that they are not opposed to the development drive in Ethiopia, but that they are determined to safeguard Egypt’s water rights and their country’s future. The fact remains that Ethiopia suffers a major water shortage. Indeed, it has the greatest deficiency in water of all the Nile Basin countries in spite of the fact that it is the major contributor to the Nile waters. At the same time, the Ethiopian highlands are not naturally suited to the construction of large dams and water reservoirs, regardless of the technology brought to bear, and even less to the transport of reserved water across its rugged terrain. Therefore, there is little need for the excessive alarm that has been stirred by some segments of the media recently. Still, the problem is not insignificant and there is a rift in Egypt’s relations with other countries of the Nile Basin. In view of these considerations, Egypt needs to sustain a policy towards those countries based on the spirit of African brotherhood and cooperation, as opposed to confrontation and political blackmail. In this spirit, it must continue to offer aid and assistance to African countries, especially those in the Nile Basin, and not just in the realm of water resource development but also in a range of other fields, from agriculture to trade and industry and education.

The key to resolving the current crisis begins with Ethiopia, which should be given priority among the Nile Basin countries, in the construction of water projects. Ethiopia has the lowest rate of electricity consumption in the world — less than 1,000 megawatts (80 per cent of Ethiopians live
without electricity). Nor will it affect Egypt and Sudan’s share of Nile water if Ethiopia undertakes small water projects commensurate with its topography, such as electricity generating plants that capitalize on steep inclines or agricultural projects, whether dependent on precipitation or irrigation, which in any case would be relatively limited in view of the ruggedness of the Ethiopian terrain. However, “Ethiopia can not divert a tributary of an international river shared by nine other nations. This is not just about Egypt and Sudan. International rivers are governed by laws and conventions, in accordance with which any action that affects water quotas requires advanced notice and guarantees against possible harm,” said Allam. Experts predict that by 2050, Egypt will require 21 billion cubic meters of water above its current quota in order meet the needs of its population, which is expected to climb to 150 million by then. The writer is head of Al-Masryeen Centre for Strategic Studies.

Post-Mubarak Egypt has softer line on Nile’

CAIRO, (UPI) (December 9, 2011) -- With the downfall of Hosni Mubarak, Egyptian leaders are showing more willingness to discuss sharing the waters of the Nile River with Ethiopia and other African states that have been battling for a better deal to accommodate their swelling populations. While Mubarak was in power, he used Egypt's political and military weight in the region to resist any change to the country’s dominance of the Nile's waters that dates to the British colonial era. But the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which forms the interim government since Mubarak was forced out by a popular pro-democracy uprising Feb. 11, is displaying signs of being more cooperative in this long-running dispute. This probably has a lot to do with the plethora of pressing problems Egypt faces as its moves through the uncertain transition toward political and economic reforms.

Apart from anything else, the independence of South Sudan July 9, splitting Sudan, Egypt's ally in the Nile dispute, in two, undercut Cairo's intransigence. South Sudan, which has voting rights as the 10th riparian state in the Nile Basin, says it too wants to build hydroelectric dams on a tributary of the White Nile to give the impoverished, infant state an economic boost. As early as September, SCAF agreed to set up a joint technical team with Ethiopia, the most vociferous of the upstream states demanding a more equitable share of the Nile's water, to review the impact of a $4.8 billion Grand Renaissance hydroelectric dam Addis Ababa declared it planned to build.
Experts from Sudan, another Nile state and Egypt's neighbor, will also take part in the team's operation. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia's strongman and Mubarak's fiercest opponent on the Nile issue, moved swiftly after the Egyptian dictator was toppled. In May, Zenawi agreed to delay ratification of a 2010 agreement signed by six of the nine upstream states that stripped Cairo of the right under a 1929 British-orchestrated treaty to 75 percent of the Nile's flow, until a new Egyptian government was elected. Egypt insisted on maintaining the 55.5 billion cubic meters it takes annually from the Nile, at 4,163 miles the world's longest river. That's more than half the total annual flow of 84 billion cubic meters. Egyptian authorities say the country will need 86.2 billion cubic meters by 2017, a volume it cannot meet given its current resources.

The Nile, which rises in Lake Victoria in East Africa, is literally Egypt's lifeline. Most of its 81 million people live along its banks. Without the Nile, the ancient civilization that built the pyramids would never have emerged. Zenawi infuriated Mubarak by building five big dams on the Nile over the last decade, defying Cairo's right under the 1929 treaty to have a veto over all upstream dam projects. Apart from the Grand Renaissance Dam, which will be the largest in Africa, Ethiopia says it plans to build two other dams on the Nile as part of a program to boost its electricity production to 20,000 megawatts over the next decade. President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, another of the key upstream states lined up against Cairo, also wants to build a series of dams to boost his country's generating power from 300 MW to 3,800 MW over the next five years. "We also have plans to generate 17,000 MW by 2025," Museveni said.

In September, Zenawi met Egypt's caretaker Prime Minister Essam Sharaf in Cairo in a further effort to reduce tension and negotiate a new agreement. "We can make the issue of the Grand Renaissance Dam something useful," Sharaf said, indicating that progress was now possible. "This dam, in conjunction with the other dams, can be a path for development and construction between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt." There are other issues involved in the Nile dispute. But the most threatening is the scramble by non-African states such as Saudi Arabia, China, India and South Korea to buy or long-lease vast tracts of arable land in Africa to produce wheat, rice and corn for export to those countries. These land grabs cut the food supply in famine-prone African countries and the export of grain to nations unable to grow enough for themselves -- like Egypt.

NILE POLITICS: Egypt seeks Saudi help on Ethiopia water dispute'

Author Ayah Aman (March 6, 2014)
CAIRO — Egypt is considering preparing a formal request for Gulf mediation under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, in order to back Cairo’s stance vis-à-vis the ongoing conflict with Ethiopia about the

Renaissance Dam. The mediation request comes as part of a basket of escalatory measures adopted by Egypt in January, following the breakdown of technical negotiations among the Egyptian, Sudanese and Ethiopian water resources ministers.

Summary. Egypt has turned to Saudi Arabia to help pressure Ethiopia into compromising on the Renaissance Dam, which Cairo fears will cut off vital water supplies from the Nile River.

Speaking to Al-Monitor, an Egyptian government official said, “A detailed report is currently being prepared to examine and explain Egyptian concerns relating to the building of the dam, in the absence of a clear agreement with Ethiopia about it. The final draft of the report, which explains the concerns over the repercussions the construction of the dam will have on Egypt and Sudan, will be sent to the International Panel of Experts.”

The official, who has close ties to Egyptian decision-making circles, added, “Egypt will ask Ethiopia, through the mediation, to sign a binding agreement with Egypt stating the dam’s operational specifications, its stored water capacity, and the amount of water that will be regularly released in a manner that does not negatively affect Egypt’s share of that water.”

This convergence of views between Egypt and the Gulf countries — except for Qatar — began after the ouster of President Mohammed Morsi by the army on July 3, 2013. While the Gulf leaders expressed their satisfaction toward the change in the political scene of Egypt after the fall of the Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates rushed to offer financial aid packages to the Egyptian government, amounting to $10.7 billion in the span of only six months.

“Resorting to Gulf mediation will help Egypt gain more time. As Ethiopia is rushing to build the dam, we are running out of time and are unable to re-launch negotiations, which puts us in a critical situation,” the official added.

According to the same official, “Egypt is preparing this dossier after receiving verbal assurances from Saudi and Emirati officials that they
would back Egypt in all issues affecting its national security. This problem has been discussed in the many meetings that took place between Egyptian and Gulf officials since last June 30.”

“The Gulf mediation is a good and useful step, but it is conditional on the acceptance of both countries,” Mahmoud Abu Zeid, the head of the Arab Water Council, told Al-Monitor.

Abu Zeid said the potency of such mediation efforts lies in the fact that Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait have strong economic ties with and large investments in the Ethiopian market.

The head of the Arab Water Council, whose membership includes Saudi officials, added that it was possible for the council to play an important role in helping alleviate the ongoing tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia. But the Egyptian government has yet to ask it to intervene, and Egypt’s concern with the water issue still requires direct guidance from the president, as well as an intensification of efforts to solve the crisis, Abu Zeid said.

Saudi Arabia contributes to economic development projects in Ethiopia through investments made by Saudi businessmen in infrastructure projects. In addition, it offers Addis Ababa further support through the Kuwaiti Development Fund, OPEC and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, with the Ethiopian parliament endorsing projects financed by Saudi Arabia in energy and agriculture. Furthermore, the kingdom plays host to thousands of Ethiopian workers who are employed in a variety of jobs, particularly as domestic labor, despite that this issue was the cause of tensions after Saudi Arabia expelled a large number of illegal workers.

In January 2011, the Director of the Ethiopian Investment Authority, Abi Walad Meskel, estimated Saudi investments to be close to $3 billion dollars, making Saudi Arabia the largest investor in Ethiopia, followed by India, China and Turkey.

Al-Monitor spoke with an Egyptian diplomat assigned to the Ethiopian relations dossier. “Any change in the amount or terms of monies given to the Addis Ababa government will greatly contribute in compelling Ethiopia into reassessing its stance towards Egypt, as well as committing to a serious and constructive dialogue in order to resolve the continuing crisis that exists between the two countries concerning the Renaissance Dam,” he said.
The diplomatic source, who requested anonymity, asserted, “Arab financial pressure was the best of options in the escalatory scenario currently adopted by Egypt, following strong indications that the Egyptian Minister of Water Resources’ visit to Italy would be successful, and the uncertain prospects vis-à-vis resorting to the international community, now that Egypt has a new government in place.”

African affairs specialist at the Al-Ahram Center for Political Studies, Hani Raslan, cautioned, in an interview with Al-Monitor, about “the current state of affairs, which was no longer confined to mere tensions and constituted a direct and imminent threat to Egypt, as a result of it being deprived of its water rights. Ethiopia refuses to recognize previous international norms and conventions, as well as Egypt’s historical right, and considers the waters of the Nile to be its property.” Raslan further warned against any attempts to impose a fait accompli and move toward adopting a policy where water would be sold after the building of dams.

Raslan opined that Saudi mediation did not stop at direct negotiations with Addis Ababa, but also entailed putting pressure through other diplomatic channels that exist between Saudi Arabia and the United States.

He also asserted, “The success of Saudi intervention would primarily be to the benefit of Egypt, in accordance with the political pledges and interests that Saudi Arabia has undertaken vis-à-vis Egypt lately.”

The Arab world suffers from an inability to secure daily water needs, with a November 2013 UN report estimating that Arab countries needed to allocate at least $200 billion for water resource management during the next 10 years, just to address this crisis. The report also warned about the nonexistence of comprehensive international agreements governing transboundary waters, despite that one-third of the surface water upon which the Arab world relies originating outside its borders, with the same applying to ground water in the Arabian Peninsula.

News reports have pointed toward a shift in the food security policies of Gulf countries from Africa to Europe and America. Gulf countries are re-evaluating their projects aimed at securing their food security through some African nations, such as Ethiopia, following increased animosity toward Gulf investors among locals and the spread of public reservations about Arab investments on their lands. This is a result of the massive investments that Gulf countries made to purchase tens of thousands of hectares of cheap farmland in African countries, which they used to satisfy nearly 90% of their food needs.
The Renaissance Dam crisis continues to dominate the rhetoric of Egyptian officials, as the Ethiopian side asserts its intention to proceed with the project. Despite Cairo’s efforts, there’s no clear indications that their efforts thus far have made any inroads.

Nile River Dam Threatens War Between Egypt and Ethiopia -IPS’

By Cam McGrath (March 23, 2014)

Ethiopia is building one of the largest dams in the world, the Grand Millennium Dam (GERD), on the River Nile near the Sudan border.

(IInternationalRivers.org)

CAIRO - When Egypt’s then-president Mohamed Morsi said in June 2013 that “all options” including military intervention, were on the table if Ethiopia continued to develop dams on the Nile River, many dismissed it as posturing. But experts claim Cairo is deadly serious about defending its historic water allotment, and if Ethiopia proceeds with construction of what is set to become Africa’s largest hydroelectric dam, a military strike is not out of the question.

Relations between Egypt and Ethiopia have soured since Ethiopia began construction on the 4.2 billion dollar Grand Renaissance Dam in 2011.

Egypt fears the new dam, slated to begin operation in 2017, will reduce the downstream flow of the Nile, which 85 million Egyptians rely on for almost all of their water needs. Officials in the Ministry of Irrigation claim Egypt will lose 20 to 30 percent of its share of Nile water and nearly a third of the electricity generated by its Aswan High Dam.

Ethiopia insists the Grand Renaissance Dam and its 74 billion cubic meter reservoir at the headwaters of the Blue Nile will have no adverse effect on Egypt’s water share. It hopes the 6,000 megawatt hydroelectric project will lead to energy self-sufficiency and catapult the country out of grinding poverty.

“Egypt sees its Nile water share as a matter of national security,” strategic analyst Ahmed Abdel Halim tells IPS. “To Ethiopia, the new dam is a source of national pride, and essential to its economic future.”

The dispute has heated up since Ethiopia began diverting a stretch of the Nile last May, with some Egyptian parliamentarians calling for sending
commandos or arming local insurgents to sabotage the dam project unless Ethiopia halts construction.

Ethiopia’s state-run television responded last month with a report on a visit to the site by army commanders, who voiced their readiness to “pay the price” to defend the partially-built hydro project.

Citing a pair of colonial-era treaties, Egypt argues that it is entitled to no less than two-thirds of the Nile’s water and has veto power over any upstream water projects such as dams or irrigation networks.

Accords drawn up by the British in 1929 and amended in 1959 divvied up the Nile’s waters between Egypt and Sudan without ever consulting the upstream states that were the source of those waters.

The 1959 agreement awarded Egypt 55.5 billion cubic meters of the Nile’s 84 billion cubic meter average annual flow, while Sudan received 18.5 billion cubic meters. Another 10 billion cubic meters is lost to evaporation in Lake Nasser, which was created by Egypt’s Aswan High Dam in the 1970s, leaving barely a drop for the nine other states that share the Nile’s waters.

While the treaty’s water allocations appear gravely unfair to upstream Nile states, analysts point out that unlike the mountainous equatorial nations, which have alternative sources of water, the desert countries of Egypt and Sudan rely almost entirely on the Nile for their water needs.

“One reason for the high level of anxiety is that nobody really knows how this dam is going to affect Egypt’s water share,” Richard Tutwiler, a specialist in water resource management at the American University in Cairo (AUC), tells IPS. “Egypt is totally dependent on the Nile. Without it, there is no Egypt.”

Egypt’s concerns appear warranted as its per capita water share is just 660 cubic meters, among the world’s lowest. The country’s population is forecast to double in the next 50 years, putting even further strain on scarce water resources.

But upstream African nations have their own growing populations to feed, and the thought of tapping the Nile for their agriculture or drinking water needs is all too tempting.

The desire for a more equitable distribution of Nile water rights resulted in the 2010 Entebbe Agreement, which replaces water quotas with a clause
that permits all activities provided they do not “significantly” impact the
water security of other Nile Basin states. Five upstream countries –
Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda – signed the accord.
Burundi signed a year later.

Egypt rejected the new treaty outright. But after decades of wielding its
political clout to quash the water projects of its impoverished upstream
neighbors, Cairo now finds itself in the uncomfortable position of watching
its mastery over the Nile’s waters slip through its fingers.

“Ethiopia’s move was unprecedented. Never before has an upstream state
unilaterally built a dam without downstream approval,” Ayman Shabaana
of the Cairo-based Institute for Africa Studies had told IPS last June. “If
other upstream countries follow suit, Egypt will have a serious water
emergency on its hands.”

Ethiopia has sought to assure its downstream neighbors that the Grand
Renaissance Dam is a hydroelectric project, not an irrigation scheme. But
the dam is part of a broader scheme that would see at least three more
dams on the Nile.

Cairo has dubbed the proposal “provocative”.

Egypt has appealed to international bodies to force Ethiopia to halt
construction of the dam until its downstream impact can be determined.
And while officials here hope for a diplomatic solution to diffuse the crisis,
security sources say Egypt’s military leadership is prepared to use force to
protect its stake in the river.

Former president Hosni Mubarak floated plans for an air strike on any dam
that Ethiopia built on the Nile, and in 2010 established an airbase in
southeastern Sudan as a staging point for just such an operation,
according to leaked emails from the global intelligence company Stratfor
posted on Wikileaks.

Egypt’s position was weakened in 2012 when Sudan, its traditional ally on
Nile water issues, rescinded its opposition to the Grand Renaissance Dam
and instead threw its weight behind the project. Analysts attribute
Khartoum’s change of heart to the country’s revised domestic priorities
following the secession of South Sudan a year earlier.

According to AUC’s Tutwiler, once Sudan felt assured that the dam would
have minimal impact on its water allotment, the mega-project’s other
benefits became clear. The dam is expected to improve flood control,
expand downstream irrigation capacity and, crucially, allow Ethiopia to export surplus electricity to power-hungry Sudan via a cross-border link.

Some studies indicate that properly managed hydroelectric dams in Ethiopia could mitigate damaging floods and increase Egypt's overall water share. Storing water in the cooler climes of Ethiopia would ensure far less water is lost to evaporation than in the desert behind the Aswan High Dam.

Egypt, however, is particularly concerned about the loss of water share during the five to ten years it will take to fill the dam’s reservoir. Tutwiler says it is unlikely that Ethiopia will severely choke or stop the flow of water. Some 85 million Egyptians depend on the Nile for water.

NILE POLITICS: Egypt says co-operation continues with Ethiopia on Nile Basin projects’

Author: Walaa Hussein (March 23, 2014)

CAIRO, Egypt — In an exclusive interview with Al-Monitor at his office in Cairo, Egyptian Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation Mohamed Abdul Muttalib said that Egyptian support for technical cooperation projects for the development of the Upper Nile have not stopped. According to him, Egypt is continuing with its bilateral projects in Tanzania, Uganda and South Sudan, and even in Ethiopia. However, because of legal problems, it is a different matter when it comes to the cooperation projects that were being carried out under the umbrella of the Nile Basin Initiative. Abdul Muttalib noted that his ministry is determining whether it is physically possible to link the Nile and Congo rivers: the legal dilemmas of linking the two rivers are being left to legal specialists.

The interview follows:

Al-Monitor: How do you see the future of cooperation at the technical level between Egypt and the Nile Basin countries, and with Ethiopia specifically? What are the most prominent joint projects for the development of the Upper Nile that are still ongoing? What projects have stalled after Egypt froze its membership in the Nile Basin Initiative?

Abdul Muttalib: Cooperation is continuing, and this is a very positive thing with regard to the future of Egypt’s relations with the Nile Basin countries. Evidence of the continuation of this cooperation was translated in a practical way during my recent visit to Uganda to open well projects to provide a number of areas with drinking water. This came as part of an
Egyptian program, granting $4.5 million to remove weeds and build berths for fishermen on the shores of Lake Victoria, to make fishing easier. And Ugandans in the region are very grateful toward the Egyptian government and the Ministry of Irrigation. There are similar agreements with the Tanzanian government, and we are working on preparing to open a number of wells to provide clean drinking water in underserved areas. Moreover, we are working to ensure these wells operate on solar power, to save them expenses, and instead of having to be manually operated. We are also working with Congo on a number of new bilateral projects.

There is also a good level of bilateral technical cooperation with South Sudan. This includes building a group of dams in the southern states. The Egyptian Arab Contractors Company is working to implement a number of well-digging projects, to provide clean drinking water to the areas that have no water. We will soon announce a ceremony to open a set of these wells and to hand them over to the South Sudanese government to solve the problems with drinking water in some regions. There is also a project sponsored by Egypt to create small dams to control the flow of rainwater in South Sudan.

And even with regard to the Ethiopians, bilateral cooperation has not stopped. Training courses for Ethiopian engineers at the Egyptian Ministry of Irrigation are ongoing. The latest batch of these Ethiopian cadres recently graduated from the ministry's training center, and they were given certificates in a ceremony that I attended personally, along with the Ethiopian ambassador in Cairo, Mahmoud Dardir. This confirms that the technical cooperation projects between Egypt and all the Nile Basin countries are ongoing, and we will continue to support the development of the Nile Basin, even with regard to Ethiopia. We have no problem with continuing discussion and cooperation [with Ethiopia], and we consider this to be the [way toward a] solution.

Al-Monitor: And what about the projects that stalled after Egypt froze its membership in the Nile Basin Initiative?

Abdul Muttalib: As I mentioned, none of the bilateral cooperation projects with the Nile Basin countries have been stalled, even with Ethiopia. We are working with the latter on a new experiment lab, as part of the activities of the Hydraulics [Research] Institute, to predict flooding. And we have no problem entering into bilateral partnerships with them for technical cooperation regarding the Nile Basin region. Yet the proposed projects that fall under the umbrella of the Nile Basin Initiative are stalled
due to legal issues relating to our current position toward the Initiative, and thus we cannot work on these projects at the current stage.

Al-Monitor: Does the government of Ibrahim Mehleb have a different perception of the Renaissance Dam crisis, or will it follow in the footsteps of [former Prime Minister Hazem] el-Beblawy?

Abdul Muttalib: Obviously the positions are the same. We are talking about our rights — our rights to the Nile waters. No one disagrees on this issue, and the position will not change with a change of governments.

Al-Monitor: A recent decision by the Egyptian government opened the door for the export of rice. Does this decision increase the burdens on the Ministry of Irrigation, which complains about the amount of water this crop uses, and given that the decision also increases annual water allocations for the summer agricultural season?

Abdul Muttalib: Until now, the door has not been opened for the export of Egyptian rice. There has just been talk about a study for the decision, and it has not been ratified. The problem is that [this decision] would encourage farmers to heavily cultivate rice, despite the specified annual allocations for this crop, and [rice cultivation] consumes large amounts of water. We have a crisis concerning violations by farmers who are cultivating an area nearly twice the size of the 1 million feddan [1.038 million acres] that the government permits them to cultivate annually. And for each extra feddan of rice that is cultivated, this means that three feddan of corn are not cultivated, since the use of the water released from the High Dam is previously specified according to needs decided for each agricultural season. For this reason, the state increased the prices paid to farmers for corn, reaching nearly 340 Egyptian pounds per ardeb [$8.69 per bushel]. This will encourage farmers to work to increase the cultivation of corn instead of rice. The problem relating to export Egyptian rice involves the [high consumption] of water.

Al-Monitor: Did Egypt falling below the water poverty level coincide with the preparation of plans to search for alternate water resources other than the Nile?

Abdul Muttalib: Of course, we have projects for using all alternatives, whether groundwater or agricultural drainage water, after it has been treated for reuse. There are also seawater desalination projects using modern techniques, and they are currently being used in some coastal areas.
Al-Monitor: Egypt has multiple underground water reservoirs, the largest being the Nubian Rock reservoir. Why doesn't [the state] rely on these reservoirs to solve the water shortage problem?

Abdul Muttalib: We will be very cautious when it comes to using groundwater, because extracting this water is very costly. Moreover, we will work to restore this water in places where it is used, according to regulations in order to preserve these reservoirs, especially since Egyptian underground water reservoirs are nonrenewable. We are working very hard and we have many places where we have established agricultural development projects that depend on groundwater to [meet] the goals of the development plan. There are 150,000 feddan [156,000 acres] in Farafra that are irrigated by groundwater, and we are working to cultivate areas in the New Valley [governorate] that will entirely rely on groundwater. Furthermore, there are integrated agricultural projects in Egypt that we are establishing through relying entirely on groundwater.

Al-Monitor: Prime Minister [Ibrahim] Mehleb announced that he will abstain from drinking bottled water, stressing his confidence in drinking water originating from the Nile. However, from time to time there have been crises in rural areas related to water pollution at drinking water stations that draw from the Nile. What is your comment?

Abdul Muttalib: Personally, I drink tap water. At home I don't use bottled water, and I only use a normal filter. Thankfully there have been no problems and things are fine. But with regard to the recurrent crises, there are some things that cause water pollution problems in certain areas. For example, regarding the recent crisis in Kafar El-Sheikh and Al-Bahira, the problem was related to contamination from sewage or industrial water, and this is an accumulation of old problems. We have started to work on ending these sources of pollution, through closing four factories and companies along the Nile that were not abiding by the laws that prohibit dumping contaminated materials into the Nile. There is also cooperation with the Ministry of Housing to end the crisis of sewage overlap [with drinking water lines] and its effect on the quality of drinking water. We are working to propose new sewage plants, considering that this is the hope [for solving the crisis], and it is not acceptable to neglect the issue of Nile drinking water being contaminated with industrial and sewage water.

We are working to close any drinking water stations along the Nile where the water quality is affected by any pollutants, and periodic reports are carried out to check the quality of Nile water from drinking water stations.
This is done through a number of government agencies, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Environment, and the laboratories affiliated with the Water Research Center of the Ministry of Irrigation.

Al-Monitor: With regard to the project to link the Congo River to the Nile, why has the Ministry of Irrigation changed its position on this project, from categorical rejection given that it is incompatible with international principles that stipulate not moving water from the Nile Basin to any other basin, to agreeing to participate in studies on this project that will be conducted by an Egyptian businessman?

Abdul Muttalib: First, I want to make an important clarification, I have never changed my position toward the issue of the Congo River [project]. Recent announcements have noted that we are studying the project from a technical standpoint, and working with the team of Dr. Ibrahim al-Fayoumi in the framework of technical studies regarding the feasibility of the project. Meanwhile, other matters relating to international laws are not the prerogative of the Ministry of Irrigation. We will only work on putting in place a concept and design to determine the possibility of executing such a plan. We will leave the other matters to specialists and concerned parties, to study its legality. We did not change our position on the project. We are going through a period that requires us to support anything that could work to increase our share [of water], even if by a single drop. (Text ends)

NILE DIPLOMACY: Nile River Dam Threatens War Between Egypt and Ethiopia

By Cam McGrath (March 24, 2014)

Ethiopia is building one of the largest dams in the world, the Grand Millennium Dam (GERD), on the River Nile near the Sudan border. (InternationalRivers.org)

CAIRO, EGYPT - When Egypt’s then-president Mohamed Morsi said in June 2013 that “all options” including military intervention, were on the table if Ethiopia continued to develop dams on the Nile River, many dismissed it as posturing. But experts claim Cairo is deadly serious about defending its historic water allotment, and if Ethiopia proceeds with construction of what is set to become Africa’s largest hydroelectric dam, a military strike is not out of the question.
Relations between Egypt and Ethiopia have soured since Ethiopia began construction on the 4.2 billion dollar Grand Renaissance Dam in 2011.

Egypt fears the new dam, slated to begin operation in 2017, will reduce the downstream flow of the Nile, which 85 million Egyptians rely on for almost all of their water needs. Officials in the Ministry of Irrigation claim Egypt will lose 20 to 30 percent of its share of Nile water and nearly a third of the electricity generated by its Aswan High Dam.

Ethiopia insists the Grand Renaissance Dam and its 74 billion cubic meter reservoir at the headwaters of the Blue Nile will have no adverse effect on Egypt’s water share. It hopes the 6,000 megawatt hydroelectric project will lead to energy self-sufficiency and catapult the country out of grinding poverty.

“Egypt sees its Nile water share as a matter of national security,” strategic analyst Ahmed Abdel Halim tells IPS. “To Ethiopia, the new dam is a source of national pride, and essential to its economic future.”

The dispute has heated up since Ethiopia began diverting a stretch of the Nile last May, with some Egyptian parliamentarians calling for sending commandos or arming local insurgents to sabotage the dam project unless Ethiopia halts construction.

Ethiopia’s state-run television responded last month with a report on a visit to the site by army commanders, who voiced their readiness to “pay the price” to defend the partially-built hydro project.

Citing a pair of colonial-era treaties, Egypt argues that it is entitled to no less than two-thirds of the Nile’s water and has veto power over any upstream water projects such as dams or irrigation networks.

Accords drawn up by the British in 1929 and amended in 1959 divvied up the Nile’s waters between Egypt and Sudan without ever consulting the upstream states that were the source of those waters.

The 1959 agreement awarded Egypt 55.5 billion cubic meters of the Nile’s 84 billion cubic meter average annual flow, while Sudan received 18.5 billion cubic meters. Another 10 billion cubic meters is lost to evaporation in Lake Nasser, which was created by Egypt’s Aswan High Dam in the 1970s, leaving barely a drop for the nine other states that share the Nile’s waters.
While the treaty’s water allocations appear gravely unfair to upstream Nile states, analysts point out that unlike the mountainous equatorial nations, which have alternative sources of water, the desert countries of Egypt and Sudan rely almost entirely on the Nile for their water needs.

“One reason for the high level of anxiety is that nobody really knows how this dam is going to affect Egypt’s water share,” Richard Tutwiler, a specialist in water resource management at the American University in Cairo (AUC), tells IPS. “Egypt is totally dependent on the Nile. Without it, there is no Egypt.”

Egypt’s concerns appear warranted as its per capita water share is just 660 cubic meters, among the world’s lowest. The country’s population is forecast to double in the next 50 years, putting even further strain on scarce water resources.

But upstream African nations have their own growing populations to feed, and the thought of tapping the Nile for their agriculture or drinking water needs is all too tempting.

The desire for a more equitable distribution of Nile water rights resulted in the 2010 Entebbe Agreement, which replaces water quotas with a clause that permits all activities provided they do not “significantly” impact the water security of other Nile Basin states. Five upstream countries – Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda – signed the accord. Burundi signed a year later.

Egypt rejected the new treaty outright. But after decades of wielding its political clout to quash the water projects of its impoverished upstream neighbors, Cairo now finds itself in the uncomfortable position of watching its mastery over the Nile’s waters slip through its fingers.

“Ethiopia’s move was unprecedented. Never before has an upstream state unilaterally built a dam without downstream approval,” Ayman Shabaana of the Cairo-based Institute for Africa Studies had told IPS last June. “If other upstream countries follow suit, Egypt will have a serious water emergency on its hands.”

Ethiopia has sought to assure its downstream neighbors that the Grand Renaissance Dam is a hydroelectric project, not an irrigation scheme. But the dam is part of a broader scheme that would see at least three more dams on the Nile.

Cairo has dubbed the proposal “provocative”.

Egypt has appealed to international bodies to force Ethiopia to halt construction of the dam until its downstream impact can be determined. And while officials here hope for a diplomatic solution to diffuse the crisis, security sources say Egypt’s military leadership is prepared to use force to protect its stake in the river.

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Egypt’s position was weakened in 2012 when Sudan, its traditional ally on Nile water issues, rescinded its opposition to the Grand Renaissance Dam and instead threw its weight behind the project. Analysts attribute Khartoum’s change of heart to the country’s revised domestic priorities following the secession of South Sudan a year earlier.

According to AUC’s Tutwiler, once Sudan felt assured that the dam would have minimal impact on its water allotment, the mega-project’s other benefits became clear. The dam is expected to improve flood control, expand downstream irrigation capacity and, crucially, allow Ethiopia to export surplus electricity to power-hungry Sudan via a cross-border link.

Some studies indicate that properly managed hydroelectric dams in Ethiopia could mitigate damaging floods and increase Egypt’s overall water share. Storing water in the cooler climes of Ethiopia would ensure far less water is lost to evaporation than in the desert behind the Aswan High Dam.

Egypt, however, is particularly concerned about the loss of water share during the five to ten years it will take to fill the dam’s reservoir. Tutwiler says it is unlikely that Ethiopia will severely choke or stop the flow of water. Some 85 million Egyptians depend on the Nile for water. (Text ends)

NILE - Egypt wants to Diverting the Congo River to the Nile’

World News Politics (March 25, 2014) During the ongoing crisis between Egypt and Ethiopia over the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam, which threatens catastrophe for Egypt as we have discussed in previous articles in Al-Ahram Weekly, some have aired the idea of connecting the Congo River with the Nile. This, they say, will feed our river with 110
billion cubic metres of water a year through a canal and/or tunnel linking one or more branches of the Congo with the White Nile or with one of its tributaries in South Sudan. From there, of course, these billions of cubic metres of water would head northward, join up with the waters coming from the Atbara and Blue Nile and continue northwards into Egypt.

As its advocates summarise the idea, it would require the construction of dams or sluices on the Congo at a location some 600 kilometres from the White Nile. There the water level would have to be raised, by means of pumps, by a huge 250-300 metres in order to counter the opposing territorial incline. Then the water would be propelled towards South Sudan and the White Nile. Then, at some point in South Sudan, the water level would be raised again so as to channel it into a “new Nile”, some 2,500 kilometres long, to conduct the water through Sudan and on into Egypt’s Western or Eastern desert. Clearly a project of such a scale and complexity needs to be studied very closely by the relevant experts who will need to be extremely precise in their calculations and to take into consideration a range of other technical and non-technical factors.

In fact, the idea of an artificial Nile is not new. Colonel Muammar Al-Gaddafi had once proposed it beneath the banner of African development and the redistribution of the continent’s water resources among African Union members in the vicinity. He charged a team of experts with the task of undertaking the necessary studies, but the idea was soon dismissed because of its infeasibility due to the technical, political and environmental complications involved.

The group that is currently advocating the same idea also does so in the name of African development that, according to them, begins with a project to divert the Congo into the Nile. Such a project, they argue, will free Egypt forever from the spectre of water deficit, which has come to loom more perilously than ever in view of the Ethiopian hydraulic projects, particularly the Renaissance Dam. It is worth noting, here, that the head of this group is a businessman with projects in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and a former irrigation engineer and geologist in the Egyptian Mineral Resources Authority.

More significantly, it is important to bear in mind that no written technical, scientific or feasibility studies for such a mega-project currently exist. The only material that is available and that has been submitted to some government authorities was compiled from photos taken off the Internet and that have no geotechnical or architectural value. When authorities at the Egyptian Mineral Resources Authority were asked whether they had
studies for such a project, they responded that they did not, contrary to the claims of the advocating group. The same applied to the Faculty of Engineering at Cairo University. The faculty’s irrigation and drainage department said that they had never undertaken a scientific study for that project. Moreover, they also said that the group advocating the Congo River diversion project had asked them only for a design for a model village and for a design road parallel to the “new Nile” should the project be carried out. The latter request was curious since, as any engineer will tell you, roads cannot be designed on the basis of satellite imagery. Field surveys and measurements have to be conducted on the ground. Apparently the group also asked for a study on the amount of energy that would be required to raise the water level to the necessary height. According to the calculations of an advisory organisation, more than seven gigawatts would be needed, which is to say the equivalent to the amount of power that would be generated by the Renaissance Dam.

As for the concept of a 2,500 kilometre long new Nile stretching through Sudan and into Egypt, it is obvious that its proponents had little interest in the topographical and geotechnical properties of the ground through which such an artificial river course would pass, let alone the environmental impact.

So, before indulging in this pipe dream further, let us consider the following hard facts:

- Due to the relatively steep geological incline of the DRC, the flow of the Congo is very rapid. At a rate of up to 40,000 cubic metres a second, it is one of the fastest and most turbulent rivers in the world, making it very difficult to control. Moreover, this does not even begin to take into consideration other geotechnical considerations such as the nature of the bedrock, rifts and fissures, and the like.

- Some 400,000 square kilometres of dense jungle surrounds the Congo River, adding yet another obstacle, on top of the geographical incline, to the choice of the site for constructing a dam or series of sluices near the borders of South Sudan.

- The area identified for the proposed canal leading from the Congo to the White Nile consists of a range of steep mountains. With peaks up to 2,750 and 5,170 metres, these mountains are formed of hard granite rock.
The envisioned dam (or dams) will be larger than the Renaissance Dam (with a 74 billion cubic metre reservoir capacity) and even more technologically complicated to build.

According to the group’s figures, the reservoir behind the dam would hold 110 billion cubic metres of water. It remains a mystery how they came up with this figure, as alluring as it is, given that it is exactly twice as much as Egypt’s current water quota from the Nile and more than 1.5 times the amount of water to be retained behind in the Renaissance Dam.

Designing the open canal or tunnels or pipelines, or whatever means are conceived to transport such enormous quantities of water, is in itself a herculean task.

Southern Sudan, where the water from the Congo would be initially destined, is primarily marshland. What precautions, if any, have been envisioned to prevent that area from being submerged beneath the water that would be flooding in from the Congo?

The branch of the White Nile, with which the Congo is meant to be connected, does not have large capacity. It cannot hold more than 12 billion cubic metres a year.

The artificial river that would stretch 2,000 kilometres through South Sudan and Sudan and then another 500 kilometres in Egypt would have to be a multinational endeavour and as it would pass through rugged terrain and both inhabited and uninhabited areas the obstacles facing it would be virtually insurmountable. If we have not yet been able to resume work on the comparatively modest Jonglei canal project, imagine the fate of a mega-project such as the “new Nile” meant to carry twice the amount of water as the old Nile.

Proponents of that project have billed it being able to transport 110 billion cubic metres a year, generate 18 gigawatts of electricity and to reclaim 80 million acres of land all at the cost of LE8 billion. They say, moreover, that it could be completed in the space of 24 months or, if we add the additional six mentioned by a senior official, 30 months. Such “projections” only underscore how unscientific the proposal is.

The huge media fanfare surrounding this project is unwarranted and incomprehensible. But what is more suspicious are the claims voiced by members of the group promoting this project, that it has already obtained
the approval of government authorities in spite of all the objections on the part of specialists in geology and hydraulic engineering, experts in feasibility and technical studies, legal experts, especially those informed on matters regarding international river courses, and political analysts who are aware of the nature of the relations between the countries of the Congo and Nile River basins and of the fact that the DRC already is engaged in hydraulic projects with South Africa that will generate 40 gigawatts of power. All these people agree that geologically, architecturally, politically, mechanically and economically the project is totally unrealistic. If it were at all feasible, why would we object so strongly to the Renaissance Dam? (Text ends)

Egypt mulls international arbitration over Ethiopia’s Renaissance Dam’

Ethiopian water minister calls on Cairo to re-engage in talks on controversial dam project

Cairo, Asharq Al-Awsat (April 3, 2014) — Addis Ababa confirmed on Wednesday that it is ready to open talks with Cairo on its Renaissance Dam project, following news that Egypt has formed a special legal committee to look at the possibility of securing international arbitration over the issue of Ethiopia’s Grand Renaissance Dam.

Talks between Ethiopia and Egypt broke down in January amid technical differences of opinion over the affect that the dam will have on Egypt’s share of Nile waters. Cairo claims that the construction of what will be Africa’s largest dam will have a significant effect on the flow of the Nile River, although Addis Ababa says that such fears are over-exaggerated.

Ethiopian Water Minister Alemayehu Tegenu said on Wednesday that the Addis Ababa government had “exerted utmost efforts to build trust among all riparian countries,” adding that “Egypt has continued to engage in negative campaigning against the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.”

Speaking at a ceremony held to mark three years since construction of the dam started, Tegenu criticized Cairo’s attempts to politicize the action of a panel of experts tasked with studying the dam’s potential impact on downstream states.

“Egypt is determined to delay the tripartite engagement by withdrawing from the Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt forum,” he said, adding: “We urge Egypt to re-join the engagement and work for the benefits of our countries.”
Addis Ababa’s call for Egypt to re-engage with the talks comes following news that Cairo has formed a high-level ministerial committee—including three international law experts—to determine Egypt’s legal rights to Nile waters and the possibility of securing international arbitration.

Egypt’s Foreign Ministry on Monday confirmed that Cairo’s stance towards the controversial dam project remains unchanged. Foreign Ministry spokesman Badr Abdelatty issued a statement saying that “Egypt’s stance towards the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is clear and there is no room at all to waive or risk endangering Egypt, because the issue is considered a national security one.”

Abdelatty added that Cairo has a plan to tackle the crisis, saying it is “gradually being implemented.” That plan covers the political, legal and technical aspects of the dam, he said, adding that it aims to push for “serious negotiations” to guarantee the interests of all riparian states.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmy spoke with EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton about the Egyptian–Ethiopian dispute before the start of the EU–Africa summit in Brussels on Tuesday. The summit began on Wednesday, with Fahmy expected to discuss the dam project with his Ethiopian counterpart, Tedros Adhanom, during the two-day conference.

Asharq Al-Awsat is the world’s premier pan-Arab daily newspaper, printed simultaneously each day on four continents in 14 cities. Launched in London in 1978, Asharq Al-Awsat has established itself as the decisive publication on pan-Arab and international affairs, offering its readers in-depth analysis and exclusive editorials, as well as the most comprehensive coverage of the entire Arab world.

Egypt’s Potential Presidential Candidate Threatens to Use Force Against Ethiopia’s Dam’

SUDAN TRIBUNE (April 9, 2014) An Egyptian potential presidential candidate hopeful announced today that he will order the use of military force against Ethiopia if the latter does not suspend the construction of the Grand Renaissance dam. In announcing his presidential bid at a press conference on Sunday, lawyer Mortada Mansour said that “water for Egypt is Egypt’s life”. “There are signed international conventions... .There are two agreements, one in 1929 and the other in 1959 to regulate water usage between Egypt and Sudan,” Mansour added.

The controversial figure, who was elected last week as head of Cairo’s Zamalek Club, accused Israel of standing behind the Ethiopian dam
project and dismissed popular initiatives to resolve the dispute with Addis Ababa. “There are international organizations that failed [to mediate] and Ethiopia stuck to its position. Just like they threatened to use their army, Egypt has an army. If Israel which is inciting Ethiopia learned a lesson from the Egyptian army in 1973 [war], you are threatening my life. I will not allow you to build your dam and block water from me and in the end famine occurs among the Egyptian people and we kill each other for a drop of water,” Mansour said.

“Just like they showed off and brought their generals around the dam and said if Egypt can come. No we also have generals and planes O’ Ethiopia that can reclaim Egypt’s rights because we will not allow a drop of water to be cut, to have drought in the country, in agriculture, people can’t find a drop of water. This is vital for us. I thought that for subsequent Egyptian administrations that the issue of water is a life or death issue. This is not up for discussion” he added. Egypt fears that the $4.6 billion hydropower plant will diminish its share of the river’s water flows, arguing its historic water rights must be maintained.

Ethiopia is the source of about 85% of the Nile’s water, mainly through rainfall in its highlands, with over 90% of Egyptians relying on water from the Nile’s flows. In June 2012, a panel of international experts tasked with studying the impacts of the Ethiopian dam on lower riparian countries, including Sudan and Egypt, found that the dam project will not cause significant harm to either country. Cairo remains unconvinced and has sought further studies and consultation with Khartoum and Addis Ababa.

If Mansour’s candidacy is endorsed by the presidential commission he will face the former Egyptian defense minister Field Marshal Abdel-Fatah El-Sisi who is widely seen as almost certain to win. The leftist political figure Hamdeen Sabahi has also pledged to compete in the elections. Mansour has made a failed bid to run for president in the 2012 elections but was disqualified by the elections committee. According to a profile by the Daily News Egypt, Mansour said in 2011 that he did not “have the right to run” for president because he is “ill-tempered”.

In April 2011, Mansour was accused of being involved in Tahrir clashes commonly dubbed “the Battle of the Camel” on 2 February, which left 11 demonstrators dead and hundreds injured. He was later acquitted of all charges however. He ran in four parliamentary elections in 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2012, but only won in the 2000 elections. In 2012, he lost to an opponent from the Muslim Brotherhood. He is well known for his hot temper and was taken off air in TV phone interviews a number of times for
using obscene language. Mansour is also seen as someone who is obsessed with filing numerous police complaints and lawsuits against figures he has disputes with.

Nile dam study fails to stem the tide of Egyptian indignation towards Ethiopia’

The Guardian (April 18, 2014) - The opening sentence of Egypt's new constitution describes the country as the river Nile's gift to Egyptians. It is a grand claim, but one that helps explain Egypt's indignation at the ongoing construction of a blockage on the Nile, thousands of miles upstream: the $4.7bn (£2.8bn) Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

Egyptians have long maintained that Ethiopia's dam project will dangerously deplete its water stocks – about 95% of which are derived from the world's longest river. A year ago, a former Egyptian water official boldly claimed that the Gerd might deprive Egypt of up to 10bn kilolitres, devastating roughly a million acres of farmland along the shores of the Nile.

"Then you might cross the Nile on the back of a camel," the former head of Egypt's National Water Research Centre said at the time, in what were highly contested claims.

Egyptian politicians have used such claims to portray the dam as a threat to national security, and have occasionally made ambiguous statements about the possibility of military action. For their part, the Ethiopian government sees the Gerd as a crucial developmental goal – a 6,000 megawatt source of surplus electricity that they could sell to foreign countries to boost their economy.

Last month, the saga took a fresh twist after the leak of a highly anticipated and hitherto suppressed report into the long-term effects of what would be Africa's largest hydroelectric dam. Written by two water experts from each of the three main countries concerned – Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan – as well as international advisers, the report was seen as a much needed means of arbitration between the parties concerned.

But for nearly a year the report's contents were a mystery. After its submission last April, publication was suppressed at the request of one of the countries involved, enabling all concerned to make whatever claims they liked about its contents.
That should have changed at the end of March, when a leaked version (pdf) was finally published by the International Rivers Network (IRN), an independent group that campaigns against dams across the world. But rather than clarifying the dam’s impact once and for all, the report has become the latest pawn in a war of words between Egypt and Ethiopia.

IRN said it showed that "big questions remain" and called for a halt to the dam's construction. But Ethiopian government spokesman Getachew Reda said the group was "absolutely biased", and "part of the smear campaign organised by Egypt". In the meantime, the dam's construction continues apace.

The report is nuanced and complex, and does not try to quantify exactly the likely downstream effect of the dam on Egypt's water supply. But its 48 pages nonetheless contain alarming findings. If the dam's reservoirs are filled during years of average or above-average rainfall, says the report, the hydroelectric capacity of Egypt's downstream Aswan High dam (Had) – which provides about 15% of Egypt's power – could face a temporary 6% decrease. But if filled during years of below-average rainfall, the Gerd may "significantly impact on water supply to Egypt and cause the loss of power generation at Had for extended periods".

Among other criticisms, the report warns that the dam's foundations may need further structural support to protect against sliding. It also says Ethiopia has done little to assess the Gerd's effect on local people, ecosystems and biodiversity. Based on these findings, the IRN concludes that the report "confirms Egypt's concerns that the project's impacts could be significant", and calls for construction to cease pending better analysis.

Not all independent analysts share this view, however. According to Dr Ana Cascão, a researcher at the Stockholm International Water Institute whose doctoral thesis analysed hydropolitics in the Nile basin, Egypt fought for the report to be kept secret. Cascão argues the study is largely optimistic about the Gerd's impacts – "and that's why Egypt was not happy for it to be released". It is critical about the dam's social and environmental impact, she says, "but otherwise – in terms of dam safety and even in terms of water going downstream – the report is quite positive".

This is because the Gerd may eventually help to reduce the build-up of sediment in downstream dams like the Had, increasing capacity. The Gerd will also help to keep the Nile's flow – which presently fluctuates according to the amount of rainfall, potentially causing problems for downstream
farmers even in Egypt – constant throughout the year. In terms of structural safety, Sudan – the country most endangered by any catastrophe at the Gerd – is satisfied with its construction.

Egypt's interests may actually be aligned with Ethiopia's, since Ethiopia will ultimately want to see as much water flow through the Gerd as possible in order to maximise hydroelectric power. It is, says Cascão, Sudan's intentions that may instead cause the greatest long-term concern for Egypt. The Gerd would allow Sudan to siphon off more downstream water for farm irrigation, potentially allowing the republic to take more water from the Nile than allowed by an agreement signed with Egypt in 1959.

Sudan has achieved this leverage by engaging positively with the dam's construction: Egypt's only means of reaching a grand compromise may be through similar engagement. But it may now be too late. According to the Ethiopian government, an army of 8,500 builders, working 24 hours a day, has already completed about 30% of the 1,800 sq km site.

NILE - Egypt to 'escalate' Ethiopian dam dispute

Aljazeera (April 21, 2014) In the three years since construction began on the 1.8km Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam across the Blue Nile River, Egypt and Ethiopia have been engaged in a war of words over its potential impacts. Ethiopia believes the massive dam will herald an era of prosperity, spurring growth and attracting foreign currency with the export of power to neighbouring countries. But Egypt has raised concerns about the downstream effects, as the Blue Nile supplies the Nile with about 85 percent of its water.

Both sides say they seek a negotiated solution, but they remain at loggerheads, with negotiations stalled. Ethiopia insists the dispute must be resolved through negotiations between the two parties, with Mahamoud Dirir, the ambassador to Egypt, noting in a statement last month that "there are only two... countries in the entire world which are well-placed to mediate between Egypt and Ethiopia." Egypt, meanwhile, is quietly lobbying the international community for support against what it says is a violation of international law, diplomatic sources confirmed to Al Jazeera.

"Egypt plans to take actions to escalate the situation against Ethiopia," said a western diplomat in Cairo, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "But the exact implications of these actions [are] still unclear." Egypt's main concern is water security, as the country faces a future of increasing
scarcity. Nearly all of Egypt's water comes from the Nile, and its population of 83 million is growing at nearly two percent annually. Already, water shortages cause problems. The most common response is the reuse of wastewater in agriculture, often untreated. The 2005 UNDP Human Development Report for Egypt stated that "poor water quality affects both health and land productivity with damage costs estimated to have reached LE 5.35 billion [$7.7m] or 1.8 percent of GDP."

Doaa Ezzat Zaki al-Agha, a water management specialist conducting research in the Nile delta, said five members of her family died from liver disease, which she believes resulted from poor drinking water. "They have no other choices, only the Nile water," she said. Mohamed Abdel Wahab, a farmer from a small village of 300 families near the delta city of Alexandria, an area that regularly experiences water shortages, believes the government should be "more strict with Egypt's sovereign right to water" – and his view reflects that of many Egyptians. Any threat to the country's water supply is treated as an existential threat. Accordingly, Egypt has long opposed upstream development projects on the Nile. In the past this prevented Ethiopia from receiving money from international organisations like the World Bank, which has a "no objection" rule for projects it funds. Now, Ethiopia is funding the $4.8bn project itself.

Tensions peaked in May 2013 when Ethiopia began diverting the Blue Nile. Former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi told a national conference: "We will defend each drop of Nile water with our blood if necessary." Today, statements from the Egyptian Foreign Ministry are more conciliatory, with spokesperson Badr Abdelatty saying he hoped the situation could be resolved through "cooperation". A recent statement by Abdelatty on the State Information Service website, however, adds: "The Ethiopian dam is an issue that can bear no compromises."

The last negotiations in Addis Ababa in February stalled over whether international experts should be included in a technical committee being formed to implement the recommendations of a May 2013 report on the dam. Written by an international panel of experts (IPOE), the report proposed more extensive assessment of the dam's potential transboundary environmental and social impacts. "We must have an international member on the committee and the Ethiopians refused this," said Khaled Wasif, a spokesperson for the Egyptian Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources. As construction of the dam progresses – it is already 30 percent complete – Ethiopia has less incentive to negotiate and Egypt has less leverage. With negotiations at an impasse, Egypt is
petitioning other countries for support, sources say. By referring to supposed breaches of international law, Egypt hopes to pressure donor communities who have investments in or influence on Ethiopia, according to the western diplomat in Cairo.

Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmy has toured Africa and Europe in recent months and Nile water has been on the agenda. During a trip to Italy at the start of February, Fahmy asked the Italian company contracted to build the dam to halt construction. A Foreign Ministry letter to the Salini Construttori company, obtained by Al Jazeera, states: "The government of Egypt calls upon the EU Commission, and the esteemed European governments, to give due consideration to the accountability of business enterprise of European nationality for their conduct in supporting Ethiopia's projects affecting the Nile river downstream states." It continues: "Egypt also calls upon the government of Italy, to invite Salini construttori to suspend construction works at the GERDP [Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project] until the recommendations of the IPOE Report are implemented."

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry, the EU delegation in Cairo and the Italian embassy in Cairo declined to comment on the note. A spokesman for the Italian embassy said: "On this aspect we don't feel like replying on their behalf [of the Egyptian foreign ministry]. If they don't want to talk about it, it is fine for us as well." According to the diplomat in Cairo, Egypt has also lobbied the US, China, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Japan, as well as international organisations such as the World Bank. Spokespeople for all of these governments and organisations declined to comment, with the exception of the Japanese embassy in Cairo, which denied being approached by Egypt on the issue.

Until recently, Egypt has relied on a "historic right" and colonial-era treaties to defend its water share. "This position is absolutely untenable," said Owen McIntyre, a professor of international water law at University College Cork, noting the colonial-era agreements "completely ignore upper riparian states". Today, Egypt's position has evolved, with the government quoting "widely respected" principles of international law. "International watercourses are governed by a set of agreed legal rules and principles," Abdelatty said. "Among these widely respected rules and principles is that of the equitable and reasonable utilisation of the river, the 'no harm' rule, and the prior notification rule."

However, Egypt's interpretation differs from that of its neighbour and much of the international community, McIntyre said, noting the principle is
generally formulated in terms of "significant harm". The May 2013 IPOE report concluded that despite more studies being needed, long-term effects of the dam were unlikely to harm Egypt. In the short term, however, less water will reach Egypt as the reservoir fills. While Ethiopia says it is open to negotiating the period over which it fills the reservoir, Egypt insists it will be harmed regardless. A country’s dependence on water is the primary factor by which harm is evaluated, McIntyre said, and Egypt insists it is a water-scarce country. "The problem is that when you look at Egypt's use of Nile water, it is actually rather wasteful," McIntyre said. The harm principle is just one factor to be considered alongside the obligation on states to cooperate in the reasonable and equitable utilisation of transboundary watercourses, he added. Egypt's history of cooperation is not strong. The Nile Basin Initiative, a partnership of Nile riparian states formed in 1999 and supported by the World Bank, aimed to create a cooperative framework agreement for the management of Nile water. But Egypt refused to sign any agreement that did not guarantee its current share of Nile water.

In addition, Egypt previously objected to the very principles it now advocates. It did not support the UN Watercourses Convention 1997, which codified the principles of transboundary water management. "Egypt cannot get help through international water law as Egypt herself did not acknowledge these principles historically," said Muhammad Mizanur Rahaman, a professor of international water law at Asia Pacific University in Bangladesh. By acting unilaterally, "Ethiopia is now, ironically, following the same path as Egypt did before" when it constructed the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s, Rahaman noted. "Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan should all agree on the principles which they agree on before trying to take refuge or shelter from the principles of international water law."

Egyptian satellite to monitor construction of Ethiopia's disputed dam’

By Ahram Online (April 30, 2014) - A new Egyptian satellite will track the construction of an Ethiopian hydroelectric dam over which officials in Cairo and Addis Ababa have been locked in a standoff over fears that the project will hinder Egypt's access to the Nile's water.

Launched almost two weeks ago, Egysat will monitor Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam by capturing high quality photos of the construction site along with other sources of the Nile, said Alaa El-din El-Nahry, vice president of Egypt's National Authority for Remote Sensing and Space Sciences.
The LE300 million satellite – which will come into operation in mid-June after a two-month test period – will track the dam's height, storage capacity and water discharge. It will also monitor the Kongo River basin to assess the effectiveness of a proposed project to link the Kongo and Nile rivers.

Egypt's government believes the satellite's findings will bolster its negotiations with Ethiopia and provide legal ground in case it must resort to international arbitration over any violations in the dam's stated purpose of electricity generation, El-Nahry said during a seminar in Cairo, according to Al-Ahram's daily Arabic newspaper.

Egypt has been particularly concerned that the dam, now more than 30 percent finished, will hugely impact its share of the Nile, the country's main source of potable water. Situated near the Sudanese border on the Blue Nile, a Nile tributary, the hydroelectric dam will be the biggest in Africa, capable of producing 6,000 megawatts of energy.

Last week, Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn urged Egypt to return to the tripartite discussions with Ethiopia and Sudan in an effort to settle the dispute. The three countries have been engaged in a series of dialogues since the launch of the project three years ago.

Last year, Ethiopia and five other Nile-basin countries – Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Burundi – endorsed an accord, the Cooperative Framework Agreement, which replaces a 1929 treaty granting Egypt veto power over any project on the Nile in upstream countries. Sudan, Egypt's immediate downstream country, has backed Ethiopia's plans to build the dam.

NILE: Egypt Suffers From Hydro-Political Short-Termism’

Addis Fortune, Addis Ababa (May 11, 2014)

OPINION - Born out of the Ottoman Empire and British colonial rule's historical revulsion to the development by the upper riparian nations of the Nile River, Egypt's recent revolutionary tide against the construction of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is storming regional and international diplomatic fields with ill-founded and spurious forecasts of the menace of the project on the lives and livelihoods of Egyptian people. Fettered by the stubborn adherence to the British and Ottoman's "own will", Cairo's polity is now incapable of putting a bridle on the fickle nature
of its political officials' largely whimsical hydro-diplomatic acts to halt Ethiopia's move in making the project a reality.

Cairo's hydro-diplomacy single-mindedly and glaringly roams hither-and-thither to whittle away Ethiopia's determination. This mindset heavily leans on Egypt's time-honoured dependency on outsiders to extend its interests.

An Egyptian foreign ministry spokesperson's recent remarks are a case in point, illustrating Egypt's hydro-political dependency and will to cripple Ethiopia's march to accomplish its dam and perpetuate its insatiable interests over the Nile. Badr Abdelatty told Reuters on April 23, 2014, that "We have contacts with everybody... with Russia, with China, you name it", to bar them from supporting and financing Ethiopia's efforts to accomplish the grand project, stressing that the GERD was a violation of Egypt's interests.

This attempt is extremely antithetical to Ethiopia's stance over the intent of the construction of the GERD. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn epitomises the GERD as "a real expression of the nation's commitment to a project which demonstrates the determination of the people and the government to win the war against poverty whatever the cost".

Indeed, Ethiopians have committed themselves to ensure that indignity, famine and war will not wither their eyes along the banks of the tributaries of the Blue Nile, Barro-Akobo and Tekezze - including various tributaries, such as Wanqa, Jamma, Muger, Guder, Agwel, Didessa, Shita, Chamoga, Weter and Beles. They have also affirmed that the GERD will turn the Nile into a passage of light, conquering the roots of mistrust, suspicion, underdevelopment and Egypt's exclusive mastery over the resources of the River for the shared benefit of all Basin countries.

Egypt's deaf ear to Ethiopia's calls for a genuine discussion is reminiscent of its historic, deep-rooted hydro-political dependence on the shoulders of the major traditional superpowers, including the Ottoman Empire (as its province), the British Empire (as its colony), America (as its Cold War client state in the Middle East & North Africa -MENA - and the Horn regions during the reign of President Anwar Sadat) and the Soviet Union (as a client in the Middle East and Africa).

In the meantime, Egypt is also wooing its traditional patrons and new emerging powers, including the US, EU, Russia and China, as well as many other major powers, to eternise its long-cherished geo-political goal
of "controlling the Nile", immortallising the legacy of British colonial rule and the Ottoman Empire's path towards the development, utilisation and use of the waters of the Nile River. Blown by the waves of its long-term dependency syndrome and driven by the de facto ruler, Cairo is pursuing another hydro-political card to outsmart Ethiopia's march towards inclusive prosperity and common will, upholding the recently oft-repeated second Cold War rivalry (the US and Russia) to project its unilateral securitisation of the Nile and transcend its short-term interests over the Nile Valley.

After Egypt's independence from colonial rule, the country's leaders sought support from foreign powers to deter Ethiopia's development projects on the Blue Nile, Tekeze and Barro-Akobo. In fact, they were, according to Yacob Arsano (Prof.), successful in crumbling the Abay (Blue Nile) Master Plan Study of 1958 to 1964. They also played a quintessential role in crushing the Gilgel Abay Project of 1960s.

More ominously, President Sadat also obliterated Ethiopia's Tana-Beles Development Project in the mid-1980s, which hoped to salvage millions of people from Wello, Tigray, Gondar, Haddya and Kambata from famines as a result of frequent droughts. Additionally, when President Gamal Abdel Nasser built the Aswan High Dam, the Soviet Union, together with its Hydro Project Institute, provided billions of dollars, technicians and heavy machinery in order to realise Egypt's symbol of power.

Egypt's hydro-political dependency on outsiders is firmly rooted in its history as a province of the Ottoman Empire and later as a colony of British colonial rule. Its dependency is not only confided to hydro-politics, but also its overall development direction.

The dependency has taken root from institutions that were developed first by the Ottoman Empire and then British colonial rule. That is why the renowned institutional economists, James Robinson and Daron Acemoğlu, assert that "the development path forged largely by the history of Ottoman and European rule" impedes Egypt from independently crafting its way to prosperity and development. They go on to say that leaders of post-independent Egypt "followed the former colonial world by developing hierarchical, authoritarian regimes with few of the political and economic institutions" to achieve their development goals.

Currently, Cairo's hydro-political short-termism vows to view Africa as a strategic and security ally to enshrine its Nile factor in the African diplomatic circle and put aside the imaginative and self-induced fear of the
Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA). Reformulating its strategic goals and objectives, post-Revolution officials in Cairo are stepping into the long-neglected African circle to seek a hand in the Nile Basin and other African countries to cement ways to maintain mastery over the geopolitical hemisphere of the Nile Valley and prevent up-streamers from using the waters for the absolute use and benefit of Egyptian people. Beyond his calls for Egypt's membership in the African Union, the Egyptian Prime Minister's visit to other African countries succinctly entails Egypt's dependency on the African circle to downplay the future development of upper riparian countries in utilising their water resources.

But it all takes root from the long overdue dependency of the country on foreign powers. Indeed, the incumbent government in Cairo sticks to Britain's accords, which cultivated the imperial political supremacy, rather than seeking integration with the Eastern Nile Basin countries. Their yearning to continue the legacy of British colonial rule, the Ottoman Empire and Cold War rivalry over the use of the waters of the Nile has now led them to calling for Russia, America and the EU to help sustain the dream of the founder of modern Egypt -Muhammed Ali - to control the head waters of the Nile.

The recent visit of presidential hopeful Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to Russia was intended to make the US and the EU switch sides, with Cairo's new roadmap on its future standing in regional and global affairs. He has also been successful in pressing Barack Obama's administration to release 650 million dollars of the total 1.5 billion dollars in aid allocated to Egypt.

His cautious move is reminiscent of the Cold War rivalry in extending the old state's interests. America and the EU have come on board to help support the coming El-Sisi government's fight against terrorism and legitimise the coup at the expense of democracy and human rights.

To the dismay of Egyptian politicians, upper riparian nations of the Nile are committed to proactively engaging in the making of today's and tomorrow's drama of regional and global affairs. They are now rethinking Egypt's unremitting hegemonic reign over the utilisation of the Nile River.

They offer another alternative - the mutually cooperative partnership over the development, management and utilisation of the Nile - to fairly and equitably channel the waters of the River for the mutual development and transformation of the Nile Valley region and for the realisation of the priorities of African Renaissance and Pan-Africanism.
Having understood the failure to modernise their country and its severe repercussions on their ancestors, Ethiopians are today financing the GERD, reiterating the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi’s remark - "we not only have a plan, but we also have the capacity to assert our rights”.

They are also committed to end one of the knottiest ironies of the world, as the Wall Street Journal put it - "the land that feeds the Nile is unable to feed itself". What Egypt needs to do is to reinvent its foreign policy direction towards the Nile, abandoning its interest in preserving the needs of the old state institutions implanted by British and Ottoman rule. It should also give passage to interdependence, rather than dependence on alien forces, to maximise its interests in rectifying the wrongs of yesterday and seek to build a better tomorrow. Mansour Al-Hadi (phd) He Is an Independent Political Analyst Based in Addis Abeba.

El-Sisi talks Marshall plan, negotiations with Ethiopia, possible pardon of some prisoners’

Former army chief Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi answered questions about political prisoners, the Ethiopian dam and other issues in the second half of his third pre-election interview on Monday.

Three anchors from the privately owned TV stations Al-Nahar, Dream and Al-Hayat fielded questions at the frontrunner for two hours. When asked if he would release those jailed for breaking the controversial protest law, El-Sisi said: "I will do anything that will help promote stability and social justice." He emphasised that he was not speaking about the Muslim Brotherhood.

The former army chief spoke of a "Marshall" plan in the works for Egypt, similar to the US sponsored plan that rebuild Europe in the aftermath of World War II. El-Sisi said education and health would be at the top of his agenda if he was elected president. I do not make promises that cannot fulfill, he asserted. "I hope Egyptians will start to feel some changes within two years [if I am elected president]." He said he would try to control inflation in order to help poor and middle class people.

He highlighted the "heroic" role of former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in the October War of 1973 and the subsequent peace treaty with Israel. Regarding the Renaissance Dam, El-Sisi called for further negotiations. The negative effects of the dam must be communicated with clarity to the Ethiopian government, he added. Regarding slums, El-Sisi said he would improve them by installing electricity and sewage facilities, and repairing
roads. El-Sisi rejected the notion that he represents former president Hosni Mubarak and that he is trying to restore the pre-January revolution regime. Such rumours should not exist, El-Sisi declared, and there should be no room for such fallacies. He said he had always been impressed by Egyptians' political awareness.

"The 25 January and 30 June revolutions, and the authority Egyptians have given me, shows they are aware of the dangers Egypt is facing." El-Sisi stressed the crucial role of the media. He said it had always tried to raise the awareness of citizens and he needed it to continue doing this. Regarding Egypt's relationship with the US, he said he would deal with all foreign countries in the same way. When told the US government would pressure the new president to include the Muslim Brotherhood in the political process, he said it would first have to convince the Egyptian people.

Speaking about the Salafist Nour Party, El-Sisi said they would help to build a prosperous Egypt. He then highlighted the role of Christians in society. He stressed that he was aware of sectarianism, and Egyptians should unite against it. Egyptians will vote for a new president on 26-27 May. El-Sisi's only challenger is Nasserist politician Hamdeen Sabahi, who finished third in the 2012 poll, which was won by Mohamed Morsi. (Text ends)

HYDRO POLITICS: Conflict deepens Middle East water crisis’
By Thomas W Lippman (May 21, 2014)

Inter-Press Service WASHINGTON - The Middle East's seemingly endless conflicts are diverting attention and resources from a graver long-term threat that looms over the whole region: the growing scarcity of water. And the situation will get worse before it gets better - if it ever does get better. Years of war, careless water supply management, unchecked population growth, ill-advised agricultural policies, and subsidies that encourage consumption have turned a basically arid part of the world into a voracious consumer of water. The trajectory is not sustainable.

Those were the gloomy if unsurprising conclusions of a three-day conference on the subject in Istanbul last week. From Libya to Iraq to Yemen, too many people and too many animals have stretched water resources beyond their limits. Some countries where the urgency is greatest, including Syria and Yemen, are the least equipped to stave off serious water crises. Jordan, always short of water, has been
overwhelmed by a flood of refugees from Syria. Iraq, which once had ample water, has lost critical supplies to war and to dams built by Turkey upstream on the Tigris and Euphrates.

Egypt has twice as many people as it did 50 years ago, with no additional water resources. The isolated Gaza strip has been grappling with a water crisis for years. And Yemen's scarce water supply is being gobbled up by the unchecked production of qat, a high-water crop with no nutritional value. Chewing the mildly narcotic qat leaf is Yemen's national pastime. "If you give them more water, they'll just grow more qat," one gloomy conference participant said. But not all the news is bad. Stable countries with lots of money, led by Saudi Arabia, are making notable progress in supply, management and consumer education.

Elsewhere, however, the prognosis is grim. No one predicted an outbreak of "water wars", or armed conflict over water supply, a specter that has often been evoked but has never materialized. But at some point in the not too distant future, water shortages could provoke mass migrations, human hardship, crop failures and some form of "triage" among populations as governments are forced to allocate supplies, said conferees, who cannot be named due to conference rules. It's not as if all this has gone unnoticed. The Middle East's water issue has been the subject of news articles, analyses by groups such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, and studies by think tanks and humanitarian groups for years.

The Istanbul conference of scientists, policy analysts and academics from eight countries - conducted on an island in the Sea of Marmara under the title "High and Dry: Addressing the Middle East Water Challenge" by the Hollings Center and the Prince Muhammad Bin Fahd Strategic Studies Program at the University of Central Florida - is the latest of many such gatherings. But little has come of them because the region has never been stable enough for sufficient time to make any comprehensive, multilateral solution possible.

According to analyses by the World Bank, the US State Department and others, a majority of the countries defined as "water-poor" - those with access to less than 1,000 cubic meters per person per year - are in the Middle East and North Africa. The State Department also predicts that climate change will add to the problem by bringing "consistently lower levels of rainfall". No government or international agency can increase rainfall or snow runoff. But the Istanbul conferees heard that the example of Saudi Arabia - the world's largest country without a river - shows that a
great deal can be done in countries with deep pockets and enough time to focus on the issue.

Saudi Arabia reorganized its government in the 1990s to centralize water planning and management. Most of the country’s water for personal and household use is supplied by massive desalination plants. The decision to build them, starting in the 1970s, was an obvious one for the kingdom. But the plants are expensive to construct and operate, leaving them beyond the financial reach of a country like Yemen. Saudi Arabia meanwhile leads the region in the recapture and reuse of wastewater. Under a new regulation from last year, for example, its giant dairy farms are required to operate on recycled water purchased from the National Water Company rather than on groundwater as in the past. Once the world’s fifth- or sixth-largest exporter of wheat - the production of which requires massive amounts of water - Saudi Arabia has banned the cultivation of wheat as of 2016 and is refocusing its agriculture on greenhouse production of vegetables and fruit.

Growing animal fodder crops such as alfalfa has been banned: owners of livestock are required to purchase imported fodder, conference participants said. Plagued by leaks in distribution pipes that drained off as much as 25% of the water it had, Saudi Arabia privatized its distribution network and encouraged foreign engineering and management companies to participate. Saudi Arabia has raised the price of water for businesses and institutions, but it has not yet ended the subsidies for households that make water so cheap: there is little incentive to limit consumption. Doing so would be politically risky in a country where subsidies for water, gasoline, and electricity are expected by a population that has no vote or other influence over the government.

Egypt, by far the most populous country in the region, has a different consumer attitude problem. Egyptians have taken the availability of water for granted since completion of the Aswan High Dam in 1970. As a result, they use water casually in the home and pump more irrigation water than is necessary onto their fields. But Egypt’s biggest concern now is Ethiopia’s plan to construct a giant hydroelectric dam on the headwaters of the Nile, reducing the flow and the amount of water stored in Lake Nasser, behind the Aswan Dam. Asked recently if negotiations over Nile water allocations were taking place between Egypt and the upstream countries, Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmy replied, "No. I wish they were."

Participants in Istanbul agreed that there is no single remedy for the water crisis. The available fixes range from the simple and obvious, such
as consumer education and the installation of low-flow bathroom fixtures, to the aspirational, such as the development of desalination plants powered by solar energy, which are thus affordable. As usual with such events, the organizers will prepare a paper outlining recommendations. The fact is, however, that solutions, even if available, will be hard to implement until the shooting stops, refugees are resettled, and governments are sufficiently stable to address them. That won't be soon. Thomas W Lippman is an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute and author of Saudi Arabia on the Edge.

Egypt's minister of electricity heads to Ethiopia for ministerial conference’

Ahmed Shaker flew to Addis Ababa Sunday to participate in the US-Africa Energy Conference, aimed at developing sustainable energy projects on the continent.

Ahram Online: (June 1, 2014) - Egypt's minister of electricity and renewable energy, Mohamed Shaker, headed to Ethiopia Sunday to participate in the US-Africa Energy Conference aimed at developing energy plans in Africa, reported the state-owned MENA news agency.


According to Shaker, the conference aims to encourage US investment in African countries and to open new markets for American companies. Africa's ministers of energy as well officials from the US administration, along with regional and non-regional energy organisations and NGOs, are participating in the conference that will be held 2-4 June in Addis Ababa.

NILE: Egypt fires it’s irrigation minister for not solving Ethiopian dam dispute’

ST (June 17, 2014) Translated from Arabic to English using Google Translator

We publish reasons for the departure of former Minister of Irrigation “Abdulmutallab” in the new government of Mahlab. Egypt’s prime minister Ibrahim Mahlab assigned Dr. Hossam Maghazi as the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation succeeding Dr. Mohammad Abdul Muttalib. Dr. Hossam is a Professor of Irrigation Engineering Faculty of Engineering, University of Alexandria. “Veto” publish the reasons for the
exclusion of Abdul Muttalib of the Ministry of Irrigation, The first one is for not being able to solve the crisis of Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which represents the biggest challenge in front of any minister assume this position.

According to Dr Mohamed Nasr El Din Allam, former Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, the reason for dispensing Dr. Muhammad Abdul Muttalib from his position is due to not being able to “bridge” the gap with the Ethiopian. In addition with regards to negotiation with Ethiopia, he is accused of not choosing representatives from professors and qualified experts who have of experience and competence that qualifies them to bear this responsibility serious.

In exclusive statements to “veto” on Tuesday that Abdulmutallab tried in the recent period to improve its image before the Engineer Ibrahim Mahlab by doing many inspection tours to a number of provinces, launched several campaigns removal of encroachments on the waterways and the River Nile. But this didn’t help him to continue in the new ministry as the first minister in the era of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Sources at the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation claim “Abdulmutallab” was expected to continue in the new government to last moment with the assignment of Dr. Tariq pole as Assistant Minister of Irrigation. Then new documents surfaced against him and Cabinet discussed to make decision in the last moment, and his removal was sure to be indispensable in the formation of the new government. (Text ends)

Sisi will resolve Nile crisis, says Egypt’s new Water Minister’

Cairo, Asharq Al-Awsat (June 21, 2014) —Egypt’s new Irrigation and Water Resources Minister Hossam Maghazi has said he expects a breakthrough in the crisis between Cairo and Addis Ababa over Ethiopia’s construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam once newly-elected President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi becomes personally involved in the talks.

Sisi is expected to hold a meeting with Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn on the sidelines of the forthcoming African Union summit in Equatorial Guinea later this month. Sisi’s participation comes a few days after Egypt’s membership to the African Union was restored.

In comments to Asharq Al-Awsat, Maghazi said: “The Nile water crisis is currently being handled at the highest levels of government, with President Sisi personally managing this file.” “A number of proposals for
the fair usage of Nile water have been put forward, but a resolution requires the political will of Addis Ababa,” he added.

Ethiopia is in the process of constructing the Grand Renaissance Dam, which will be the largest dam on the Nile River and is expected to be finished in 2017. Cairo says the dam project threatens its share of Nile water and will reduce the amount of electricity produced by the Aswan High Dam. Talks between Cairo and Addis Ababa stalled earlier this year with former Egyptian Water Minister Mohamed Abdul Muttalib saying: “Egypt has exhausted all avenues of negotiation about the dam.” Sisi made the resolution of the crisis one of his election priorities.

(aawsat.net) Maghazi, who was appointed Water Minister earlier this week, said he was ready to bear the responsibility to protect Egypt’s share of Nile water. He told Asharq Al-Awsat: “We will seek to strengthen historic relations with the countries of the Nile basin and to work with them to maximize the benefit from the Nile for all countries without negatively affecting Egypt’s historic and legitimate rights.” “Egypt does not oppose the aspirations of the Ethiopian people and is willing to provide technical support for the construction of the dam provided it does not harm the interests of both countries,” he added.

Egyptian anchorwoman suspended after live row with Ethiopia envoy'

By Ayat Al-Tawy, Ahram Online (June 23, 2014) - Rania Badawy of the private satellite station Tahrir hung up on Ethiopia's ambassador to Cairo during a live call-in over the contested Grand Renaissance Dam.

An Egyptian broadcaster has been suspended for arguing with Ethiopia's ambassador to Cairo during a live TV phone-in about Addis Ababa's ongoing Nile dam project. On Wednesday, Rania Badawy, a talk show host on the privately-owned Tahrir satellite channel, got into a heated argument with Ethiopian envoy Mahmoud Direer over the Grand Renaissance Dam, a multi-billion hydroelectric dam that has been a source of contention between the two countries for over a year. Near the end of the six-minute-long call, Badawy asked the envoy if Addis Ababa insisted on pressing forward with the dam's construction in its current form and capacity, which Egypt fears will harm its share of the Nile's water. The ambassador replied: "You do not understand about dams and are talking in a bumptious tone. Badawy then angrily told the ambassador he had "crossed his limits" and that he should not "characterise [her] talk or speak to [her] about arrogance". She then thanked him and abruptly ended the call, as his voice trailed off in an attempt to reply. The head of
the TV station, Mohamed Khedr, told Al-Ahram's Arabic news website on
Sunday that the move to suspend Badawy came amid his channel's "sense of responsibility," adding that the management was revamping the
programme map ahead of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan – which
should fall on 29 June. In comments carried by state news agency MENA
earlier in June, Ethiopia's Foreign Minister Tedros Adhanom – on a visit to
Cairo at the time – criticised local media for sending "very negative
messages, sometimes systematically, that create a feeling of rejection"
between the people of both nations. The senior diplomat, however, said
that Addis Ababa and Cairo were looking forward to a "new era" of mutual
ties. Almost 10 days ago, the same station suspended another female
broadcaster who made light of mob sexual assaults against women in
Cairo's Tahrir Square during celebrations for President Abdel-Fattah El-
Sisi's inauguration earlier this month. Khedr said Sunday that the
suspended anchorwoman, Maha Bahnasy, would return to the airwaves
after Ramadan. It has to be recalled that a protest from the Ethiopian
ambassador Mahmoud Direer led to Rania's firing. (Text ends)

NILE POLITICS: Egypt, Ethiopia agree on ‘new chapter’ in ties

By Ramadan Al Sherbini, Gulf News (June 28, 2014) - Egypt President
Abdel Fattah al-Sisi talks to Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Hailemariam
Desalegn as both arrived to attend the 23rd African Union Summit (AUS)
in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea.

CAIRO - Addis Ababa has pledged to Egypt that Ethiopia’s construction of
a controversial dam, which has strained ties between the two African
countries, will not “harm Egyptian water interests”, the official news
agency (Mena) reported Friday. The pledge came at landmark talks held
Thursday between Egyptian President Abdul Fattah Al Sissi and Ethiopian
Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn on the sidelines of an African
summit due in Equatorial Guinea. The two leaders agreed on opening a
“new chapter” in both countries’ ties based on “frankness, joint
understanding and cooperation”, MENA said, quoting Egyptian Foreign
Minister Sameh Shoukri. Shoukri and his Ethiopian counterpart Tedros
Adhanom announced Friday in Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea,
that Egypt has pledged to pursue “constructive dialogue” with Ethiopia
that heeds the later’s development needs, according to the agency.

Al-Sissi and Desalegn also agreed to co-chair a bilateral cooperation
commission to address all aspects of Egyptian-Ethiopian links, in a fresh
sign of defusing tensions that have marred the two countries’ relations for
more than a year. Earlier this month, Al Sissi said in an inaugural speech
that he would not allow the dispute over Ethiopia’s hydraulic dam being constructed on the Nile to “cause a crisis” between both countries or affect inter-African cooperation. The Cairo-Addis Ababa ties deteriorated last year when Egypt’s then Islamist president Mohammad Mursi and other politicians threatened in a meeting, broadcast live on air, to bomb Ethiopia over its building of the $6.4 billion Renaissance Dam. Last July, Al Sissi led the army’s ouster of Mursi following enormous street protests against his troubled one-year rule.

The Ethiopian dam has triggered wide fears in Egypt, which heavily relies on the Nile to cover water needs of its population of 85 million people. Egypt’s annual quota of the Nile waters is estimated at 55.5 billion cubic metres. Water sharing among the 10 Nile Basin countries is regulated under a colonial-era treaty. Some Nile Basin countries have said the treaty is unfair. Ethiopia has been urging the riparian countries to ratify the Comprehensive Framework Agreement to replace the 1959 treaty that gives Egypt and Sudan the share’s lion of the Nile waters. Six countries have already signed the 2010 pact amid Egyptian protests. Al Sissi was Friday due to make a short visit Sudan, another Nile country that shares border with Egypt, state television reported. (Text ends)

NILE POLITICS: When Egyptian Sisi Met Ethiopian Desalegn’
Le Monde diplomatique (June 30, 2014) The guests had been seated at the tables of the great hall in Addis Ababa, and fanfares rang out as the Emperor Haile Selassie walked in with President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt at his right hand. Nasser was a “tall, stocky, imperious man, his head thrust forward and his wide jaws thrust into a smile,” next to him Selassie’s “diminutive silhouette,” his “thin expressive face, his glistening penetrating eyes” worn by the years. Behind the extraordinary pair, the remaining leaders also entered in their pairs, writes Ryszard Kapuściński in his chronicle of the fall of the Abyssinian monarchy and the intrigues at Selassie’s court. The audience rose: everyone was applauding. “Ovations sounded for unity and the Emperor. Then the feast began.”

Their corresponding persons, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt and Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn — a pair less extraordinary, their relations less gregarious —find themselves seated together on June 26 at the 23rd Ordinary Summit of the African Union in Equatorial Guinea. During his presidential campaign, El-Sisi spoke of his interest in travelling to Ethiopia “not once, but ten times” for the mutual benefit of the two countries. As El-Sisi addressed the crowd at his presidential inauguration ceremony at the Qubba Palace in Cairo,
Ethiopia’s Foreign Minister Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus looked on among Arab royals, the First-Vice President of Sudan, Lieutenant General Bakri Hassan Saleh, and heads of state, from Chad’s Idriss Déby and Eritrea’s Isaias Afwerki to Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has held power in Equatorial Guinea even longer than El-Sisi’s military predecessor, Hosni Mubarak. El-Sisi professed to the crowd he would protect pan-Africanism, and he wouldn’t allow Ethiopia’s self-financed Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) to “cause a crisis or a problem with sisterly Ethiopia.” Over centuries, the Nile has tied the two countries together. Ethiopia’s priority now is power generation, while Egypt, a desert country, prioritises irrigation against the Nile water source countries on the Central African and Ethiopian plateaus, which have greater rainwater.

The GERD is a major issue of peace or war. As he summits in Malabo with Adhanom over Egypt’s Nile water crisis, El-Sisi finds himself confronted with deep and changing historical forces. When Britain occupied Egypt in 1882, Britain immediately understood it had become “ruler of a hydrological society,” and that the irrigation question was central to maintaining stability along its Suez Canal, notes Terje Tved, professor at the universities of Bergen and Oslo and an authority on the Nile. Then everything changed after the First World War, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the Egyptian revolution of 1919, and yet Britain’s strategic interests remained the same. This trickled into a series of colonial treaties, including the 1959 Nile Waters agreement, which contributed to Sudan becoming Egypt’s downstream hydro-political ally, and safeguarded Egypt and Sudan’s over 90 percent share of Nile waters. Ethiopia, the source of the Nile, was left only with ghosts of discord. Selassie himself was left affronted by Nasser’s marginalisation of Ethiopia in the 1959 agreement, and was to be overthrown in a 1974 coup d’état. At the same time, notes a March 21 2011 memorandum from the international businessman and dam engineer Dr Ibrahim Mostafa Kamel submitted to the first post-Mubarak government of Essam Sharaf, since 1969 Egypt has lost an estimated 100 million tons annually of silt, “creating a 4.1 billion silt dump which lies over the Egyptian-Sudanese border.”

Even if he is a diminutive Nasser, El-Sisi’s jaws will not likely be thrust into a smile, even a wry one. It is not even sure whether there will be a feast as in Kapuściński’s tale, or if so, whether it will be sumptuous. Only three days before El-Sisi’s presidential inauguration, the governments of Ethiopia and South Sudan arrested three Egyptians reportedly sent by Cairo to spy on dam projects in South Sudan and western Ethiopia,
principal among them the 6,000-megawatt GERD. Egypt fears the GERD is a threat to its lifeline, the Blue Nile at Ethiopia’s Lake Tana upon which Egypt depends for over 85% of its Nile water flow. As the dispute fanned to a flame earlier this year, Egypt boycotted talks over the dam as they ground to an acrimonious standstill, and followed with a diplomatic card game to enlist the support of external stakeholders and African countries keen to capitalise on strategic alliances.

The real threat to Egypt is the reaction of Sudan, given its part in the 1959 agreement: not the GERD itself. If there are signs of a rapprochement between Egypt and sisterly Ethiopia, it is by Egypt’s necessity: it coincides with a growing rift between El-Sisi’s Egypt and Omer Hassan Ahmed El-Bashir’s Islamist regime in Sudan, a former ally of Mohammed Morsi’s government of Muslim Brothers. Egypt courts South Sudan in spite of Sudan, and besides Egypt’s anti-Islamist alliance with Saudi Arabia, there are signs of a rapprochement with Libya’s anti-Islamist leader General Khalifa Belqasim Haftar. While the Sudanese vice-president Bakri Hassan Saleh attended El-Sisi’s presidential inauguration, he has also reaffirmed Sudan’s commitment to the GERD: Ethiopia is also an important strategic alliance for Sudan. One reason is its interests in the six-month long conflict in South Sudan.

The Nile Basin Initiative, which met in Khartoum last Thursday, has called on Egypt to re-involve itself in the activities in the initiative, which both Sudan and Egypt left four years ago in protest over the signing of the Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement by four Nile Basin countries (Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Tanzania). Burundi and Kenya later signed onto the NBI, which removes Egypt’s veto power over upstream irrigation and hydro-power projects. It is bound to reduce Egypt and Sudan’s historically protected Nile water share. After El-Sisi overthrew Morsi, Sudan returned to the NBI. Its new chairman also happens to be Sudan’s Minister of Water Resources and Electricity, Muattaz Musa Abdallah Salim. “I should like to place an appeal to our sister nation Egypt,” Salim said at the meeting of Nile Basin water ministers, according to AFP. “Your resumption of your activities in the NBI will further consolidate our gains and integrity in the region.”

For M. Jalal Hashim, a professor at Comboni University College and a close observer of Nile politics, the flutters of Khartoum’s heart have more to do with Khartoum’s calculations for political survival than technical issues connected with transboundary water management. “If Khartoum stood against the GERD, this may lead Ethiopia to host the military opposition of
the regime, and the remaining of the regime in Sudan is a matter of inertia, not strength,” he says. “There is enough opposition to put it out.” During his brief reign, Morsi, who is now languishing behind bars in El-Sisi’s Egypt, showed his readiness to give the disputed area of land at the Egypt-Sudan border called the Halayeb triangle to Sudan, a matter Hashim thinks played a role in his overthrow.

When the Ethiopian delegation brought up the topic of the GERD for the first time, in Kampala according to Hashim, the Sudanese delegation was late by hours due to disruptions in airway programmes. When they joined the meeting, he says, they discovered that the Egyptian delegation had already blessed the project. They were “furious" and made clear their reservations to the GERD being built in an area vulnerable to volcanic eruptions and notified their minister, who, by his turn, notified his Egyptian counterpart in protest. “If such a tremor and earthquake takes place and destroys the GERD that would be disastrous to both Sudan and Egypt,” according to Hashim. “The water will be almost 26-metres high in Khartoum for days. The threat of dam collapse can wipe out Sudan, while Egypt would not be affected directly.”

The Sudanese experts repeatedly warned their government while negotiating with the Ethiopians, “hoping that wisdom would prevail, but in vain,” says Hashim. According to him, Khartoum’s position at the time prompted the Egyptian delegation to withdraw their agreement to the GERD, while Khartoum’s position has now aligned with the rising power of Ethiopia, which Egypt continues to contest. Even while Ethiopia’s award of a no-bid contract to an Italian company to construct the US$4.8bn. dam contributed, alongside Egypt’s earlier protests, to it being left without concessional finance, the World Bank is heavily invested in Ethiopia and region. At the end of last month, the bank approved US$178.5mn. credit and a US$254.5mn. grant to help Ethiopia develop its geothermal energy resources to boost electricity supply. Several electricity export contracts have already been signed, and Yemen’s Minister of Electricity Saleh Sumai and Adhanom have now agreed to begin studying electrical interconnection between the two countries across the Red Sea through Djibouti.

Ethiopia seeks to capitalise on its new economic development, part of which involves the Nile: Egypt faces the winds of an economic and national cohesion crisis. Sounds for unity are growing: but because Egypt is fast running out of alternatives, and faces major change on the Nile. As the late rebel-turned statesman Meles Zenawi said in an interview on
Egyptian television, the relationship between the two countries is “like a very old marriage, which has no possibility of divorce. It has its ups and downs, but it is very solid. It is of long standing.” “Sometimes we quarrel, sometimes we agree,” Zenawi told the Egyptian interviewer, radio waves fizzing in the background. “That has been the case for thousands of years.”

Writer Nizar Manek is an independent journalist reporting on Africa.

BBC News: Egyptians uncertain about future under President Sisi

By Marina Ottaway Wilson Center (July 2, 2014 Last updated)

A year ago, many hailed him as their saviour for overthrowing President Mohammed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood.

They elected him president in May, with a 97% majority of votes cast.

Now Egyptians are trying to find out how retired field marshal-turned-President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi plans to tackle Egypt's problems.

Puzzling personality

For a man who has effectively been in power for a year, President Sisi has revealed little about himself and above all about his vision for Egypt.

He was not elected on the basis of his programme. One aide says he did not present one until the very end of the campaign in order to avoid unnecessary debate and controversy.

Nor was he elected on the basis of his charisma. A military man all his life, he comes across as serious and dignified, but not inspiring.

He is not an eloquent public speaker, although people who meet him find him sincere and convincing.

He was elected above all for having overthrown President Morsi.

A year later, most Egyptians are still happy about the demise of Mr Morsi, but somewhat puzzled about Mr Sisi.

During a recent trip, the questions I asked Egyptian politicians, analysts, and businessmen about President Sisi’s policies elicited remarkably numerous answers along the lines of "I really do not know", including from people who repeatedly participated in meetings with him.
The first few weeks of Mr Sisi’s presidency have begun to provide glimpses into his personality, or at least the public persona he has chosen.

They have also given some indication about his political views, but have revealed almost nothing about how he intends to tackle urgent economic problems.

**Leading by example**

Mr Sisi wants to be seen as a serious, honest, hard-working, and pious president.

During the election campaign, he repeatedly warned Egyptians of the hard work ahead, and he is continuing to do so now.

He has told his ministers they must set an example by being in the office by 07:00.

He emphasises the contribution individuals can make towards solving Egypt's problems. If people rode their bicycles or walked to work, he says, they would save the country millions in oil imports.

He has announced that he is donating half his salary and half his personal assets to support the Egyptian economy - a move that will force senior officials and prominent businessmen to do the same. In fact, the defence minister has already announced the military will donate $140m (£82m).

He has ordered the ministry of finance to enforce rules on maximum wages.

He talks about the importance of religion and leaves no room for doubt about his own commitment to Islam: his forehead bears the mark that develops when a person prays regularly.

He has stressed that Egypt is committed to "correcting the religious discourse" and freeing it from extremism.

New initiatives and laws (many announced by the outgoing interim President Adly Mansour after the election but before the inauguration of Mr Sisi) convey the same messages about rectitude and morality.

Egypt's ministry of youth and sports has declared it will combat atheism among young people.
The ministry of interior has banned religious slogans on vehicles. The interior minister also says he'll form a new department that will handle sexual assault cases, and Mr Sisi has already demonstrated his personal interest in the issue, by being photographed on a hospital visit to a woman receiving treatment after an assault in Cairo's Tahrir Square during his inauguration celebrations.

**Top-down political control**

On the political front, however, the message from the president and his government is one of strict top-down control over all aspects of life. During the election campaign, Mr Sisi said democracy in Egypt would be impossible for at least 25 years.

His actions, too, leave no doubt that he prefers order and discipline over individual choice. The laws governing the forthcoming parliamentary elections guarantee a weak parliament because they favour individual candidates over political parties.

Mr Sisi has established a Supreme Council for Legislative Reform by decree, which will be able to draft new laws and leave the parliament to do the rubber-stamping.

He has also tightened control over religion and education. Only preachers licensed by al-Azhar, one of the main centres of Sunni Muslim learning, will be allowed to deliver sermons, and Mr Sisi will personally appoint university presidents and deans.

Repression of the Muslim Brotherhood continues, with over a thousand members sentenced to death by the courts in summary trials. Young people who defy the anti-protest law brought in last December have been given tough sentences.

So have al-Jazeera journalists accused of fabricating stories. Even street vendors and people who litter have been targeted, in an effort to clean up the cities.

**Uncertainty over economy**

On the most important challenge he faces - reviving the economy - President Sisi has sent out very few and contradictory signals, and, with about 25% of ordinary Egyptians living below the poverty line and a similar percentage hovering just above it, he must act soon.
The business community is waiting for clear signals about his intentions.

Even Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, all countries which have poured billions into the Egyptian economy since President Morsi’s overthrow, are hinting they will not continue their support indefinitely, particularly if Egypt does not adopt clear policies and major reforms.

Mr Sisi has done neither. His approach is confusing: he states the private sector has a role to play, if not a duty to invest. But he remains committed to the state sector and has put the military in charge of managing the massive housing projects financed by the United Arab Emirates.

Above all, the government cannot reach a decision on the urgently needed reform of food and energy subsidies, which occupy a third of the budget.

Plans are periodically announced but never implemented, in case they lead to unrest.

The latest announcement, on 30 June, that the government will slash energy subsidies by the equivalent of $5.6bn (£3.3 bn) was typically vague: savings will be achieved through "redistribution and restructuring," he has said, but without a timetable.

Egyptians still have a lot to discover about their new president.

Marina Ottaway is a Senior Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center and a long-time analyst of political transformations in Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East.

Egypt Irrigation Minister: We will give a proposal for reducing the height of GERD’

Translated from Arabic to English using Google Translator. Edited slightly for readability.

ST (August 11, 2014) - Dr. Hossam Mughazy, Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources said Egypt would present new proposals to the government of Ethiopian during the negotiations that will take place between them on Aug 25 and 26 in Sudan’s capital “Khartoum”.

The Irrigation Minister said this workshop about water resources organized by the National Center for Research on Water Day Monday with Intercontinental City Stars.
The new proposal includes modifying the technical specifications for the height of the dam on the basis of scientific sophisticated studies. Mughazy pointed Ethiopia will reach the same desired results to generate electricity, with different size and storage capacity. He explained the negotiations will aim to uphold the principle of «do no harm» which was announced at the joint statement issued by Egyptian and Ethiopian political leaders.

NILE POLITICS: Egypt looks for 'win-win' situation with Ethiopia over dam’

By AhramOnline (August 26, 2014 ) Egypt entered into negotiations with Ethiopia and Sudan in Khartoum on Monday with the objective of convincing Ethiopia to change the technical specifications of its Grand Renaissance Dam so as not to infringe on Egypt's share of Nile water.

According to Egypt's irrigation and water resources minister, Hossam El-Moghazi, the Egyptian delegation currently in Sudan has a new "vision" to present at the negotiations: explaining the threats the dam with its current technical specifications will pose on other countries. Cairo and Addis Ababa have been at odds in recent months over the dam, which Egyptian officials say will impact its share of Nile water upon completion.

According to Diaa El-Qousi, a water expert, Egypt will never accept the dam with its current specifications or dimensions – a height of 150 meters and a storage capacity of 74 billion cubic meters. "With the dam's specifications and dimensions, Ethiopia will be capable of completely depriving Egypt of its water supply for one, two or even three years, which is something that Egypt will never accept," Al-Qousi explained.

He adds that the Egyptian delegation has to convince the Ethiopian side to return to the initial dimensions of the dam which date back to 1963. "[Nile] Basin countries, especially the Ethiopian side, must understand that the Nile for Egypt is not a tool for development but a source of life," said Al-Qousi. Al-Qousi believes that Ethiopia has made a political, diplomatic and technical error since it started to construct the dam by not agreeing to consider a report issued by a committee of international experts. The report was never made ??public – but Egypt has given it importance as of late.

Sherif Eissa, head of the Nile water department at Egypt's foreign ministry and a member of the Egyptian delegation in negotiations with Ethiopia, toldAl-Ahram that the committee's report found that additional studies should have been made before construction work began to assess its environmental, socio-economic and hydraulic impacts. "Experts have said
that the studies conducted by Ethiopian authorities are Level 1 and that studies of Level 2 were needed to show the impact of the dam on downstream countries," Eissa explained.

However, Ethiopia has begun work on the dam, completing almost 35 percent of the project and finishing work on two generators. "Until now, Ethiopia self-financed [the project] with a billion dollars from taxes, so that each Ethiopian pays a month of his annual salary for the dam, in addition to the money transferred by Ethiopians who work abroad, those of the Ethiopian airline and foreign aid," said Eissa.

The current phase of the work is the least expensive. The next phase will necessitate more funds and Ethiopia will not be able to finance the project on its own. Egypt is now seeking a compromise with Addis Ababa. "Egypt does not ask much," Eissa said. "We only want to secure our water supply in the short, medium and long term. We respect Ethiopia's right to development, provided that this right does not affect Egypt's interests towards Nile water."

He explained that Egypt's current aim in the Sudan negotiations is to achieve a win-win round of talks. "There are many ways to reach a compromise. We will focus during the meetings on the specifications of the dam, the volume of water behind the dam and reservoir and on joint management that guarantees the production of electricity in Ethiopia and the natural flow of water to Egypt," he said before travelling to Sudan.

However, changing the technical properties of the dam so as not to undermine Egyptian interests will require additional funding. "If Ethiopia will be understanding and cooperative and respond positively to our demands, Egypt will try to convince some Arabs to help Ethiopia finance the project," he said.

The Ethiopian dam in figures

Project cost: $4.8 billion

Dam height: 170 meters

Length of dam: 1,800 meters

Number of turbines: 16

Storage capacity: 74 billion cubic meters of water
Power generation capacity: 6,000 megawatts

Date of inauguration: 2016

58 years in the making

The idea of a great Ethiopian dam dates back to the years 1956-1964, but it was not until 2009 that the Ethiopian government began the work. The plans were approved in November 2010 and the Ethiopian government officially announced the project at the end of March 2011. The dam is being built in the regional state of Benishangul Gumuz on the Blue Nile. With a power generation capacity amounting to 6,000 megawatts, the Renaissance Dam will be the largest hydroelectric dam in Africa when it is finished in 2017-2018. The exact impact of the dam on downstream countries is unknown. Egypt fears a drop in water supply due to the long duration of refuelling with a projected volume of 74 billion cubic meters. (Text ends)

NILE: Egypt, Sudan Agree to Six-Month Study of Ethiopia Hydropower Dam

By William Davison, Bloomberg (August 28, 2014)

Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan agreed to complete studies within six months on the impact of an Ethiopian hydropower dam on the main tributary of the Nile river after Egypt raised concern about water shortages. A committee of four experts from each nation will investigate the hydrological, social and environmental effects of the $4.2 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Ethiopia’s Foreign Ministry said on its website today. International consultants will implement the findings, it said. Foreign experts will help settle any disputes. The dam is scheduled to be finished in 2017.

Egypt, which relies on the world’s longest river for almost all its water, has said that it will suffer shortages while the dam’s reservoir is filled and during operation of a 6,000-megawatt power station. Ethiopia says the project will not significantly harm Sudan or Egypt and is based on a principle of “equitable utilization” of the Nile basin.

A panel of specialists, including four international experts, concluded last year that the additional studies were needed to assess the dam’s impact on the Nile’s flow and the region. Ethiopia and other upstream African nations say that Egypt’s historic legal claims to a majority of the river’s flow are invalid and have harmed their development.
Last year’s panel also recommended measures to improve the dam’s stability. Ethiopian engineers informed Egyptian counterparts of updates to its design at a two-day meeting in Khartoum, Sudan, that finished yesterday, the Ethiopian ministry said. The discussions “enhanced confidence” between the three nations and there was no reason for Ethiopia to halt construction of the dam, Water, Energy and Irrigation Minister Alemayehu Tegenu said in the statement. Ethiopia’s government says it’s completed 35 percent of the project that was officially launched in April 2011 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2017.

Egypt Aware of Time Factor Importance in Ethiopia Dam Talks – Minister

(Cairo) Egypt State Information Service (August 29, 2014) - Egyptian Irrigation Minister Hossam Mokhazi said on Thursday Egypt is well aware of the importance of the time factor in the tripartite negotiations on Ethiopia's controversial Renaissance Dam. He told MENA that a timetable was set to put into effect items agreed upon by Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia at the end of the fourth round of talks that was concluded lately. Within two weeks, the three countries will decide on the international consultancy office that will conduct necessary studies called for by the international expert committee formed over the dam, the minister said. Also, the three countries will form a national committee to aid the international consultants, he said, adding that each country will be represented by four experts in the national committee. The consultancy office is supposed to finish within six months studies on the impact of an Ethiopian hydropower dam on the main tributary of the Nile River. He said Egypt is keen that all differences on the dam will be settled in 2 or 3 months from the day the studies are prepared. He noted that the first stage of the $4.2 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, scheduled to be finalized in December of 2015, does not harm Egypt or Sudan either in terms of water quotas or social and economic effects. The final stage of the dam is to be finalized in mid-2017.