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SETTLING AFTER THE REVOLTS? EGYPT'S POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS AND VIOLENT TRANSITION

Addressing and Mitigating Violence

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This paper analyses how political configurations examined through the lens of political settlements in transition contexts influence national and local levels, types and experiences of violence. Egypt is used as a case study to examine the interplay between the elite power-brokering inherent in political settlements and people's influence on the processes, outcomes, and very survival of such pacts. The paper notes that in the period between January 2011 and January 2013, Egypt witnessed two regime ruptures and three political settlements being forged against a backdrop of increasing levels of violence.

While not all forms of violence can be accounted for in terms of the nature or outcome of the political settlement, the paper argues that first, the nature of political settlements in terms of its inclusionary/exclusionary nature does have a bearing on violence, but only in constellation with other contextual factors. The paper shows, for example, how increased political violence witnessed after the Egyptian revolution in 2011 has its roots in the informal pact forged between the Supreme Council for Armed Forces (SCAF) and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in 2011, which excluded key political actors. A second political settlement was forged between the Muslim Brotherhood and a broad spectrum of political actors popularly known as the Fairmont Agreement in June 2012, which promised political support for President Morsi to win the elections against his contender in return for power sharing if he became president. However, a majoritarian approach to governance pursued by the Muslim Brotherhood when in power catalysed some youth groups to resort to violence, a strategy that benefited from a public mandate, manifest in the very limited expressions of public condemnation of it.

The reverse is true of the third political settlement forged after the ousting of President Morsi in June 2013. When the Brothers resorted to violence against the ruling powers, the public did not condone their actions and in fact, represent a key actor resistant to their inclusion in any unfolding political settlement. In effect a bottom-up approach to political settlements, pursued in this paper, shows that the public play a key role in legitimising or rejecting the use of political violence to leverage influence in shaping the nature of the political settlement.

The paper is based on a mixed method approach undertaken between May 2012 and January 2013 covering the period of Egypt from the January 2011 revolution and up to seven months after the ousting of President Morsi in July 2013. Qualitative research on the actors, agendas and networks involved in violence was complemented with a survey of 2,423 citizens who had participated in the 30 June revolts and 12 focus groups undertaken in six governorates.

The paper notes that at the moment there is no political will on the part of the key stakeholders to change the terms of the political settlement to make it more inclusive: neither the government, nor all but a small part of the population, nor the Muslim Brotherhood and allies in the Coalition to defend Legitimacy. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist political groups do not recognise the legitimacy of the current status quo in the first place and therefore have rejected all calls to participate in any of their activities (such as the Roadmap). The Egyptian government shows no intention of engaging with the Brotherhood and its allies through any other means than a systematic and bloody security crackdown. The leadership (in the person of General Abdel Fattah El-Sissi) is unlikely to yield to Western pressures to stop the crackdown on the Muslim Brothers because he will not sacrifice his populist standing. Hence, in effect the only political will that is in favour of a political settlement that includes the Muslim Brothers is that of a number of Western governments, who have spoken of inclusive democracy. At the moment they do not have the political clout to influence the internal scene in Egypt.

The key policy messages of this paper are:

- *Recognition of limitations of direct Western policy influence* in view of the public perception of their displays of partisan standpoint against them. Western actors should be particularly sensitive to recognise that attempts at direct policy influence, in particular *vis-à-vis* human rights are likely to create a backlash that will be felt most intensely on a local level.
- *In order to regain credibility among the Egyptian people reflected in public opinion towards the West, governments should adopt a policy of condemning all parties involved in violence, whether it be initiated by state or non-state actors. This will contribute to altering the image that Western governments are partisan to violence perpetrated against the pro-Morsi faction and not against the broader citizenry.*
- *Promote transitional justice* Multilateral agencies may wish to strengthen relations with the Egyptian Ministry of Transitional Justice in order to increase its capacity and its influence in Egyptian society. Such collaboration can take the form of sharing experiences of approaches to transitional justice pursued in other countries that have experienced high levels of violence and polarisation, as well as building local capacity to design initiatives that can be mainstreamed across governmental institutions in order to promote a culture of tolerance and forgiveness.
- *Prioritise youth job creation* A large proportion of Egypt's youth exists in a context of high unemployment especially among the educated and the urban populations. Unless jobs are created and youth provided with vocational training, political, economic and social forms of exclusion will foster the conditions for violence to thrive.