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THE CASE FOR LONG-TERM ASSISTANCE FOR EGYPT

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On June 30 Mohamed Morsi assumed the presidency, an office whose authority had been severely restricted by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). Contrary to all expectations, however, Morsi in a relatively short time pushed through a substantial changeover in the military leadership, including the SCAF Chairman (Minister of Defense and Military Production) and the Chief of Staff, and succeeded in restoring the authority of the president. As SCAF had remained politically involved even after the transition to civilian rule, its acquiescence to the new president's decisions gave rise to suspicions that some form of political deal had been worked out with the president.

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The fledgling Morsi administration has been compelled to steer a difficult course in both domestic and foreign affairs, and this is not simply because so many of the demands of the January 25 Revolution are still unresolved. The administration is also under pressure to deal with problems created by the revolution itself, above all the economic and security issues at the brunt of much of the public's discontent. The revolution paralyzed economic activity and dealt a severe blow to the livelihoods of the citizenry, while the weakening of the police and security apparatus led to deteriorating public safety throughout the country. Although these were issues necessitating prompt attention, they were tough problems requiring time to address and not amenable to a quick remedy. Alongside the public's calls for change and transformation have come growing appeals for greater lifestyle stability, and President Morsi's responsiveness is being put to the test.


The Morsi administration is beset with a number of key political issues, from creating a new constitution to holding parliamentary and presidential elections. With the basic framework for parliamentary and presidential elections in the new constitution to be determined by a Constituent Assembly dominated by Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis, attention has been focused on the nature and progress of the efforts to draft this constitution. The criticisms leveled by the secularists and liberals and their opposition to the first draft presented on October 10 once again highlighted the ideological rift. Political fighting over the final revisions to the draft will grow ever fiercer as the national referendum scheduled for November draws near. A close eye should be kept on how the ruling Muslim Brotherhood will seek to reconcile the serious differences between the Salafis and the secularists/liberals.

The evolution of the constitutional drafting process makes it evident that Islamists constitute the political mainstream in Egyptian politics, and that the secular liberal opposition is fragmented and likely to continue being politically weak. Three points merit particular attention with regard to the moves made by Islamists. The first is the relationship between the Morsi administration and the Muslim Brotherhood. The second is the relationship forming between the Muslim Brotherhood at the core of the Islamist movement and the radical Salafis. The

political rise of the Salafis is a phenomenon attracting notice across the Arab world, and they are likely to become an influential element even in Egyptian foreign affairs. Consequently, the collaboration and antagonism that develop between these two forces merit close monitoring. The third point is the future outlook for a new trend among political Islamists: moderate breakaway groups from the Muslim Brotherhood garnering a certain level of support and empathy among the younger generations and those of a liberal persuasion. These moderates enjoy an advantageous position strategically among Islamists in their ability to seek out collaboration with secular liberals as well as with Coptic Christians.

The pragmatic political style that President Morsi has adopted heretofore has earned him a generally favorable assessment in public opinion polls and elsewhere, and both the ruling Muslim Brotherhood and some Salafis have begun to show political flexibility as they become more deeply involved in practical politics. Indeed, political flexibility is also being demanded of the minority secular liberals who have a marked tendency to adhere rigidly to principles, and they are expected to look to enhance collaboration and build up their base of support with an eye to the coming parliamentary elections. One of the outcomes of the January 25 Revolution was a substantial expansion in political participation. The provisional military government suffered repeated failures, and the *vox populi* moved “from the soap box to the ballot box” to find expression. If the diverse views of the populace are to be reflected in national politics, it is essential for the sake of Egypt’s transition to democratization that more open political competition through elections become established practice. The minority secular liberal political forces have an extremely important role in this regard.

As the Arab Spring sparked upheaval across the Arab world, Egypt was the only country with parties waiting in the wings prepared to take power and, even if political turmoil does continue over the short term, Egypt enjoys conditions that have created relatively more political stability than in other Arab nations. Although the Arab world is likely to see still more political turbulence in future, Egypt can be expected to resolve somewhat quickly the political turmoil

inherent during a transition to democracy. Nevertheless, the tension between democratization and authoritarianism that has marked Egyptian politics since the dawn of the modern age is a historical legacy that weighs heavily even on an administration supported by the Muslim Brotherhood. When providing assistance to Egypt, Japan and the rest of the international community should stress a medium- to long-term perspective, and in doing so should lend a willing ear to the wide range of opinions being expressed throughout Egypt. Information needs to be gathered and research conducted in a manner not overly slanted toward the capital city of Cairo that takes into consideration the diversity of Egypt's differing regions and communities. 

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