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Egypt – An Arab Spring in Bloom

On November 22nd, Egypt's President, Mohammad Morsi, issues a Decree placing himself above judicial oversight. Earlier, he had assumed legislative authority after a court ruling on June 30 dissolved the lower house of parliament, led by the Brotherhood. The President further decreed that, until a new constitution is adopted and a new parliament is elected, all decisions made since taking office, are not subject to appeal, and barred Egyptian courts from dissolving the Islamist-led upper house of parliament (a largely toothless body). For lack of an effective Parliament, Morsi now has no legal or political oversight and is free to rule by decree, with no court of appeal. His decisions were announced on state television by his spokesman, Yasser Ali. The announcement was followed by nationalist songs. "Morsi today usurped all state powers & appointed himself Egypt's new pharaoh," would-be Egyptian President Mohamed ElBaradei wrote in Twitter, describing such steps as "a major blow to the revolution."



Morsi also decreed immunity for the Islamist-dominated panel engaged in drafting a new constitution. He instructed the panel to accelerate its proceedings and present the draft for ratification at a two-stage plebiscite to be conducted on December 15 and 22. Liberal and Christian members of the panel withdrew in protest, complaining that the President's allies had hijacked the process and are promoting a document marginalizing women and minorities, and infringing on personal liberties. Morsi's moves have fueled growing public criticism, exacerbated by the country's increased economic and social woes. Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators gathered in Tahrir Square in Cairo and elsewhere in Egyptian cities to protest Morsi's policies and the Muslim Brotherhood from which the Egyptian leader hails.

The chair of Egypt's Cabinet, Mohamed Refaa al-Tahtawi, rejected criticism, insisting Morsi "is not really trying to monopolize power. He is trying to have strong pillars for a steady progress toward democracy ... I assure you that, in the coming days, the opposition will fade away." "I don't like, want or need to resort to exceptional measures, but I will if I see that my people, nation and the revolution of Egypt are in danger," Morsi told thousands of his chanting supporters outside the presidential palace in Cairo. He and the Brotherhood contend that supporters of the old regime are stymieing progress toward democracy. They have focused on the judiciary, which has shaken up the political process several times with its rulings, including the dissolution of the lower house of Parliament, in which the Brotherhood had a clear majority.

Morsi has described his assumption of *de facto* absolute power as necessary to prevent "threats to the revolution," public safety and the workings of state institutions. He warned of "weevils eating away at the nation of Egypt," and pointed to old regime loyalists, whom he accused of using money to fuel instability, and to members of the judiciary who work under the "umbrella" of the courts to "harm the country." A Cairo mosque's preacher compared Morsi to Islam's Prophet Muhammad, saying the prophet had enjoyed far-reaching powers as leader, giving a precedent for the same to happen now.

"No to tyranny!" chanted congregants in response, while Morsi's supporters chanted, "The people support the president's decree!" pumping their fists in the air. "God will humiliate those who attack our president, Mohammed Morsi," said cleric Mohammed Abdel-Maksoud. "Whoever insults the sultan, God humiliates him," he added. The state media described Morsi's decrees as a "corrective revolution the only way to break through the constitutional deadlock.

The Muslim Brotherhood had originally promised to present candidates for no more than a third of parliamentary seats, but they fielded an extensive list and gained 47% of the seats. They then undertook not to field a candidate for presidency, and then fielded Mohammad Morsi after he resigned his long-term membership of the organization and ran as an ostensible independent. The Brotherhood engaged their formidable social network in his support, and won.

Upon election, Morsi promised to appoint a Copt and a woman as vice presidents, but never has. He replaced the old military guard with officers loyal to him and then turned to deal with the judiciary, known for its independence: he convened the Lower House although the Supreme Constitutional Court ordered it dissolved because its election was rife with irregularities, and backed down only after a stern warning from the court. A few weeks later he sought to fire the Attorney General, who insisted that the judiciary is independent of the executive and that Morsi had no authority to oust him. The President backed down again, but then used the powers he had accorded himself to limit the term of the Attorney General, effective immediately.

The Egyptian opposition, known as the National Salvation Front, has called for a reframing of the draft constitution and a delay in the plebiscite. Morsi demurred. In response, the opposition has stated that it will not accept the constitution if it passes, and yet called upon the general populace to vote "No."

The army and police have so far remained neutral, containing the crowds and defending national institutions. But army chiefs have warned that a situation may arise when military intervention will become necessary, without indicating the direction such intervention will take. In a throwback to last year's 18-day anti-Mubarak uprising, protestors have chanted the iconic slogan first heard in Tunisia in late 2010: "The people want to overthrow the regime," and "erhal, erhal," -- Arabic for "be gone, be gone" and, "The people want to topple the regime."



In Cairo, thousands threw rocks as police sought to contain the crowd. Security forces pumped volleys of tear gas at thousands of pro-democracy protesters several blocks from Cairo's Tahrir Square and in front of the parliament building. To counter the gas, young protesters set fire to tree branches. A residential building and a police vehicle caught fire. Outside a mosque in the Alexandria, anti-Morsi crowds threw stones and firecrackers on Brotherhood backers, injuring at least 15. The protesters then stormed a nearby Brotherhood office and set it on fire. State TV reported that offices of the Brotherhood's political arm were burned in the Suez Canal cities of Suez, Ismailia and Port Said, east of Cairo.

The Interior Ministry reported that authorities arrested 210 protesters. In response, thousands of protesters flooded Cairo's Tahrir Square in a second giant rally. Protests have highlighted an increasingly cohesive opposition leadership of liberal and secular politicians. The opposition announced plans for an intensified street campaign of protests and civil disobedience. Top judges have refused to monitor the referendum, rendering it legally invalid.

Islamists geared up as well. The Muslim Brotherhood called upon supporters to gather for its own mass rally. Brotherhood activists in several cities passed out fliers calling for people to come out and "support Islamic law." A number of Muslim clerics in Friday sermons in the southern city of Assiut called the president's opponents "enemies of God and Islam."

Meanwhile, the constitutional panel met for a rushed, 16-hour session that concluded in a draft constitution with a distinctive Islamic tone, although its provisions for enforcing Shariah (Islamic law) are not as firm as some conservatives wished. The assembly's white-bearded president, Hossam Ghirvani, kept the voting process apace, badgering members to move on. The

85 remaining members of the 100-member body voted on each of the 230 and more articles, passing each by wide margins.

The opposition includes prominent democracy advocate Nobel Peace laureate Mohamed ElBaradei, leftist Hamdeen Sabbahi and former Arab League chief Amr Moussa. "We are determined to continue with all peaceful means, whatever it takes to defend our legitimate rights," ElBaradei told the crowd. He later posted on Twitter that Morsi and his allies are "staging a coup against democracy" and that the regime's legitimacy "is eroding." Sabbahi vowed protests would go on until "we topple the constitution." "The revolution is back ... We shall be victorious."

Milking Evangelicals Dry

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein is evangelicalism's US Dollar milkman, and evangelicalism is the rabbi's seemingly endless source of money, especially when rockets fall on Israeli residences and distressed Israeli citizens plead for help. Rabbi Eckstein has discovered that evangelicals, especially American evangelicals, will give unblinkingly, without reserve, so long as they are allowed to believe that their money is being used for the furthering of God's eschatological purposes – and these apparently are no longer thought to have to do with the Gospel, moral issues or the health and strength of an Israeli Jewish Christian witness in the land.

While Israeli congregations struggle to make ends meet, days after the Israeli operation in Gaza, Eckstein collected \$3 million for communities in southern Israel, beyond the \$5.6 million earmarked this year by Eckstein's International *Fellowship of Christians and Jews* (IFCJ) for emergency systems. Overall, in the last few years, IFCJ has spent tens of millions of dollars building, renovating and fortifying over 2,000 private and community shelters.

Rabbi Eckstein collects upward of \$100 million a year in donations, almost all from evangelical churches. IFCJ is one of the best-funded charities in the country. He is a welcome speaker at many evangelical events, while Israeli Jewish Christians receive scant mention and meager

attention, unless they are politically committed to Israel's more extreme right-wing policies. Evangelical eschatology has become wedded to a political stance, rather than to the Gospel or to moral considerations.



According to the rabbi, some \$50 million per annum are earmarked for projects such as soup kitchens and immigrant absorption centers. About \$25 million are directed at programs to help elderly Jews living under dire economic circumstances in the Former Soviet Union. A further \$5 million are used to fund various security measures for Jewish institutions in communities around the globe, and \$10 million towards Israel advocacy and education in the United States. However worthy these causes may be deemed to be, it is astounding to compare the interest they evoke among evangelicals, while Gospel preaching in Israel is viewed as a troublesome aside.

Some 20% of the IFJC's budget serves to cover IFJC's operating costs, including a reported \$824,000 a year salary for Eckstein, who makes on one month about 80% of what an average wage-earner in Israel makes in a year. Eckstein has an office with a staff of 100 in Chicago, largely engaged in fund-raising, and a smaller office of 30 in Jerusalem, where funds are allocated directly and through government agencies, municipalities and charities. IFJC has a small office in Canada, and is being opened in Korea, which has a sizable number of evangelical Christians.

Why Should Our Men work? We Send Our Women to Work Instead

In an interview with the Israeli economic paper, The Marker, Yaacov Litzman, Deputy and acting Minister of Health (from the ultra-Orthodox, United Judaism, party) addressed a range of topics occupying the public mind these days.

Following the elections, scheduled for January 22, and once task the new government is formed, once of its major tasks will be reducing the 2013 budget by NIS 15 billion. Child allowances are of particular interest in the Haredi community, characterized by large families and one or no bread-winners. In response to the idea that these allowances might be reduced, Litzman made it clear: "That's one of the things they wanted to do a few months ago when (Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu said he didn't have a majority to pass the budget.

One of the reasons he did not have a majority was that I would not support the reduction of these allowances."



"On the other hand," Litzman said, referring to an Orthodox satellite city of Tel Aviv, "Bnei Brak is not afflicted with unemployment. Why? Because [in most households] one parent works." That one parent is usually the wife. Challenged with this fact and with the fact that only 45% of adult Haredi males are employed, Litzman responded: "Nowhere is it written that males must go to work. It's enough for the wife to work ... It's absurd to expect everyone to work; who will educate the children? Who will look after them? ... Such a situation is impossible. Someone has to devote themselves to the children so they are not thrown into the street."

Most ultra-Orthodox schools refuse to teach the State's core curriculum [including math, science, English and civics] in spite of the fact that a large part of their funding comes from the State. As a result, adults educated in the Orthodox school system are ill equipped for the market place. When asked about this, Litzman said: "Take myself as an example. I didn't study the core curriculum. So what? Is that bad? Did [Knesset Finance Committee Chairman Moshe] Gafni [of United Torah Judaism] study the core curriculum?"

A Challenge to Military Authority

Israel maintains mandatory military service for all. The Orthodox community has opposed drafting their young men, insisting that their youth "sacrifice themselves in the tent of Torah." Efforts to encourage Orthodox young

men not to dodge the draft have resulted in fliers being distributed to young Orthodox recruits, calling them to join a movement calling itself "Enlisting in Faith", which carries the mission statement of helping to "direct

soldiers in the stages of army enlistment and in the remainder of army service... how to behave in circumstances whereby army orders contradict Jewish law."

The fliers state: "If you believe – that there is a difference between Jew and Gentile: If you believe - that a Jewish soldier is for the defense of Jews; If you believe - that you can influence from within; If you believe that a Jewish soldier fights the enemy even if it contradicts 'purity of arms';

If you believe – that the enemy must be punished; If you believe – that a Jewish soldier refuses orders that contradict Jewish law; If you believe that army property intended to destroy the homes of Jews must be destroyed; If you believe – that a small

cup of sugar (hinting at sugar in a vehicle's petrol tank, ruining its motor) has the power to stop great contempt... you are not alone."



[A School for Prophets in Tel Aviv](#)

According to Jewish tradition, prophecy ended upon the destruction of the Second Temple and will return only at the Redemption, heralding the approach of Messiah. Rabbi Shmuel Portman Hapartzi, founder of the *Cain and Able School of Prophets* believes that the generation of redemption has arrived and that prophecies are to be expected. The stream of Chabad to which he belongs believes that the late Rabbi Schneourson is the Messiah, that his death was redemptive, and that he is soon to return. The School aims to train coming generations of Jewish prophets. Following 10 one-hour lectures, participants will be accorded a prophet's diploma. Registration costs NIS 200 (about \$52).

"Our generation has been declared by many to be the first generation to participate in the experience of redemption," Hapartzi explains. "The Cain and Able School of Prophets aims to provide a generation of young prophets with authorized sources to direct their spiritual experiences toward way of truth and honesty." What does one need to know to become a prophet? According to the syllabus, future prophets will learn face reading, dream interpretation and ways to achieve divine spirit. The school's core studies also include an introduction to angelic communication and an exploration of the role angels play in human lives.

Rabbi Hapartzi insists, "I have solid answers to every question on the subject. I have been collecting material for several years. I am proficient in the material and I have translated most of it from Russian to Hebrew ... all the material is studied is based on biblical principles ... we already have 10 students, who will start the basic course this week. The best of these students will continue the course and, with God's help, achieve the divine spirit and serve as prophets. There are several levels of prophecy that I hope my students will achieve."

[Elections Looming in Israel](#)

By Israeli law, elections must be held every four years, by the third Tuesday of the Jewish month of Heshvan. Every Israeli citizen over the age of 18 is eligible to vote. Voters on official government postings abroad and merchant seamen are entitled to vote overseas. The present Knesset's (parliament) mandate expires on October 22, 2013, but Israel will be going to the polls

on January 22. Prime Minister Benjamin has announced early elections, unconvincingly citing the government's inability to achieve a "balanced and responsible budget." With the country facing an economic downturn, the Government's next budget will be an unpopular austerity budget. He would rather pass such a budget at the beginning of a new four-year term than at the end of the present term, with elections looming.

Citizens vote for parties, each of which has presented a list of candidates for Knesset membership. Fourteen parties are represented in the current 18th Knesset (12 were elected but there were two splits) and three new parties have announced they will be contending. Some parties determine their list of candidates by way of internal primaries. Others will have selection committees; in some cases a leading Rabbi determines the list. The 120 Knesset seats are divided between the parties that have crossed an electoral threshold (2% of valid votes cast) according to their proportion of the vote and allocated to the members by the order in which they appear on their party. Following the elections and consultations with the president, one of the party leaders forms a government with the support of at least 61 MKs.

Apart from a short period (1996-2001) when Israel experimented with direct prime ministerial elections, there has never been an outright victor. No party has won a 61-seat majority in the Knesset. Prime Minister Netanyahu's party, Likud (Coherence, or Unity) has formed a united front with Foreign Minister Yvet Lieberman's party, Yisrael Beiteynu (Israel our Homeland). This front is almost certain to win the largest number of seats. With support from the Orthodox parties and at least another rightist party recently rejuvenated, Netanyahu is poised to form Israel's next government. The reason does not lie as much in his formidable leadership abilities as in the lack of a truly viable contender from either side of the political divide. There is considerable concern over a *tendenz* among the front's legislators to erode both civil liberties and judicial authority by way of restrictive legislation.

There is a slight possibility that former Foreign Minister and former Minister of Justice, Tsipi Livni will be able to form a bloc or parties large enough to be recommended to the President as Israel's next Prime Minister.

Ministry News

I was invited by the Israel College of the Bible to write and teach a course on Historical Theology. The topic is fascinating and of extreme importance to the fledgling Israeli church. However, I was not accorded sufficient time to study, frame and write the course and therefore was regretfully forced to turn down the offer. Hopefully, more advance planning will enable me to make a contribution to the ICB's program.

At the same time, I was asked by a group of churches working for the creation of an academic study program to prepare an introductory course on Systematic Theology. This would entail a review of the who gamut of theology, introducing terms, methods and sources while providing a framework of information that will serve the students as they begin to explore specific areas of Systematic Theology in the remainder of their course.

I agreed to undertake this project and am now in the throes of writing. This has forced me, again, to set the Romans commentary aside, which was the main reason why I hesitated. But I have decided to accept the call and hope that my decision was a wise one. I will try to squeeze as many working hours as I can out of each day in an effort to reduce the delay maximally, and am seek the Lord's blessing on the writing process, which I am enjoying immensely.

At the same time, I have begun planning next year's visit to the US, during which my family plans to hold a reunion to commemorate my 70th birthday. Seventy! I never thought I'd

reach that age, let alone be as healthy and as active and I am enabled by grace to be. Thank you, brethren, for your prayers. God has obviously heard them.

In spite of the above, I have been laid up for almost a week with excruciating back pains, now considerably subsided. For the first day or two, the pain was so severe I was unable to be productive in any way. After that I was able to study for a good part of the day, and am only now slowly returning to my desk to write, according my back some rest every few hours. On December 26th I am scheduled to have the first of two operations to remove cataracts.

Bracha is well, delighted with her flower and herbal garden, picking fresh blood grapefruit from the trees, or oranges, limquat, cumquat, pomelas and other kinds of citrus. This year we have planted more tomato beds, in the expectation that we will have plenty of the fresh, red, luscious fruit for our morning salads.

I have rejected feelers to serve as an officer of the church Bracha and I are attending. I believe I can make a more valuable contribution as a congregant, supporting our Pastor and Elder and contributing to the life of the church as one among many. My days of bearing the sweet burden of responsibility that goes with authority are over. My task is now to write and teach.

Sincere thanks are due to those who have written reviews of my two books on Amazon or on Barnes & Noble. Please help us promote these books: use them for group studies and as gifts to friends. Recommend them to others.

The Lord be with you all. May you enjoy God's blessing and loving favor this coming year. Our Lord became one of us, so he could die for our sins and rise again for our justification.

Baruch, for the two Maozes.



Linked in



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