

# Egypt: Besiege the new Parliament, with demands

Wednesday 15 February 2012, by [WAGIH Tamer](#) (Date first published: 10 February 2012).

The People's Assembly's performance has thus far been frustrating to revolutionaries. Even those who had been calling for power to be handed to the elected Parliament are now reconsidering the proposal.

As evident from the Brotherhood and Salafi MPs' stances in the parliamentary sessions held so far, it could be argued that the Islamist bloc is keen on maintaining the status quo, staling the revolutionary path, and sometimes even adamant about siding with the counter-revolution, represented by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the interior minister and the security apparatus.

We should thus ask why those MPs who were elected by the people have turned against the revolution. And my basic answer is that they were opposed to the revolution in the first place.

This answer is correct, yet deficient, because not all of those opposed to the revolution are the same.

Those who are blocking the revolutionary path driven by a conservative-reformist ideology — like the Muslim Brotherhood — are different from those whose opposition to the revolution comes from a populist-rightist stance, like the majority of Salafis in Parliament.

The Brotherhood and Salafis' hostility toward the recent protests around the Interior Ministry would not have been as open as it was had they not been confident about the people's support — or at least apathy — on the issue.

This is the sad truth that everyone in touch with the people knows. Egyptians are generally unsympathetic toward the protesters in Tahrir Square, particularly those who intermittently approach the Interior Ministry and clash with security forces there.

Even though the Ultras Ahlawy — Egypt's largest group of hardcore football supporters — received deep sympathy in the aftermath of the Port Said Stadium violence that left more than 70 dead and thousands injured, and many believe the now-dissolved National Democratic Party colluded with state security to perpetrate that massacre, this sympathy has since dwindled, due to protesters' clashes with security forces outside the Interior Ministry, and in Alexandria and Suez.

## Radical policies

Those who do not believe in the role of the masses in bringing about change invariably lose faith quickly when they sense a decline in their support from the people. This attitude eventually leads to an adoption of radical policies that aim to rush change regardless of public support, particularly from the poorer segments of the society.

Even though any radicalization of the protest movement — in this case in the form of clashing with state security — may be hailed as heroic, such radical moves not constitute a solution that can introduce extensive change. An honest and heroic minority that is willing to sacrifice their lives to

defy the brutality of state security cannot introduce real change; this requires wide-scale popular participation.

To say that the poorly performing MPs are a handful of traitors who could be easily brought down or ignored is an overly simplistic assumption. The Parliament has the support of the public and the positions it takes are accepted by a majority of Egyptians, who have their own reasons for not sympathizing with the revolutionaries in Tahrir.

It is not helpful to claim that the current People's Assembly is a copy of the former legislature under Mubarak's National Democratic Party. The difference is broad: The former has the support of the people while the latter did not.

### **Besiege the Parliament!**

Revolutionaries who believe in a bottom-up approach to change should trust that people learn from their experiences. If the people are following the Brotherhood and Salafis today, unsympathetic to revolutionaries, this can and will change if revolutionaries prove worthy of their support.

But it's important to note that the Brotherhood members are different from Salafis. The Muslim Brotherhood, like any other reformist power, is affected by changes in the public mood and partially responds to them, not out of a desire to fulfill public demands but to nurture its own popularity. Salafis, meanwhile, are a far more ideologically dogmatic group, and thus less responsive to public opinion.

Therefore, any efforts intended to break the Islamist hegemony over public awareness should focus on the Brotherhood, not only because they have more popularity, but also because they claim to adhere to an Islamic agenda concerned primarily with people's day-to-day concerns. As such, they are more vulnerable to being held accountable for policies that affect people's livelihoods.

Winning over Brotherhood supporters is possible if a demands-based movement is formed and puts the Parliament to the test. The Parliament will have to either adopt the people's demands, responding to them at least in part, or face off with a vast popular movement that will fast reveal the group's inadequacies.

This was not the case when the clashes erupted at the Interior Ministry last week — public opinion was not sympathetic to the revolutionaries, which made it easy for the Brotherhood to get away with its anti-revolutionary position in Parliament.

There are several other issues that could put the Brotherhood in jeopardy, such as the economic and social demands that are likely to explode over the coming weeks if the SCAF continues to mismanage the transitional period.

That said, if the revolutionaries decide not to hold the Parliament accountable under the illusion that they can bring it down, this will be good news for the parliamentary majority, since it would give them a ready excuse to comfortably shunt responsibility for economic and social crises while retaining their seats.

Furthermore, swamping the Parliament with demands will loosen the SCAF's grip on public affairs and force the Brotherhood to enter into confrontations with the country's military leaders. These confrontations will enable the growth of the role of the people and lend momentum to the bottom-up approach to change.

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\* From Egypt Independent, Fri, 10/02/2012 - 11:22:  
<http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/648611>

\* Translated from Al-Masry Al-Youm by Dina Zafer.