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Egypt

The revolution stolen

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In less than one week, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in Egypt has emptied the final result of the first "free" presidential elections in the country's history of any real meaning, reminding everyone that it held the reins of power in the country and did not intend to let go.

On Monday June 18, hundreds of supporters of Mohamed Morsi celebrated the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood candidate at the emblematic Tahrir square. These demonstrations, expected to be massive, only lasted a few hours. A sign of prudence, as the official results were not to be announced until June 21? Although Morsi's advantage over Shafiq - the last Prime Minister under Mubarak and the candidate of the army - would be confirmed, eyes were already turned elsewhere.

On Wednesday June 13, the first turn of the SCAF's screw came: whereas the state of emergency had been lifted at the end of last month, the military police as well as the army were again authorised to arrest and detain civilians, re-establishing martial law on a de facto basis. The next day, the Higher Constitutional Court (HCC) examined the validity of the famous law of "political isolation", voted through in late April by the Muslim Brotherhood dominated Parliament, whose objective was to stop figures from the old regime from contesting the elections. It was predictable that the Court, an instrument in the hands of the SCAF, would invalidate this law and allow Shafiq to remain in the race. But it also decided to invalidate the electoral law, which led mechanically to the dissolution of Parliament as well as the Commission to write the constitution, which had only just been elected. It is a veritable institutional coup d'état on the part of the SCAF, cancelling out the vote of Egyptians during the parliamentary elections last December/January, which gave a majority to the Muslim Brotherhood and their Salafist allies in Al-Nour.

On Friday, on the eve of the elections, the hundreds of thousands of voices who chanted slogans two weeks earlier, after the verdict delivered in the Mubarak trial, gave way to a deafening silence: dumbfounded, the revolutionaries did not mobilise, whereas the Brotherhood, faithful once more to its legalist orientation, had already announced that it "respected" the decision of the HCC.

The week-end elections took place in a climate of apathy. It might be supposed that the perspective of electing a president without Parliament was intended to discourage Morsi's electorate. Anticipating a possible defeat for Shafiq, which the official results seem to confirm, the SCAF, only a few hours before the closing of the voting stations, played a new card, announcing an "addendum" to the constitutional declaration of March 2011. In addition to the legislative power it had confiscated, the army stated that it would be responsible for nominating a new Commission for the writing of the Constitution, distorting still more the process of democratic transition. In establishing its right of veto over constitutional provisions which contravened the "interests of the country", as well as on a possible declaration of war which could not be made without its backing (a provision which seems intended to reassure Israel, concerned at the prospect of a Muslim Brotherhood triumph), the SCAF has clearly marked its territory in opposition to a Morsi victory.

Without any power, but responsible before the people for the resolution of the problems posed in Egyptian society, starting with the economic crisis, the Brotherhood, if their victory is confirmed, are set to again lose their influence at the next parliamentary elections. Unless it chooses the path of confrontation with the SCAF, by mobilising its troops and calling on them to go onto the streets - at the risk of being overtaken by the revolutionary wing. For his part, the Nasserite former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi has already called for the constitution of a revolutionary bloc for the next elections. A perspective which appears quite insufficient at a time when the SCAF, having swept away already insufficient democratic gains in a few days, has shown that the only way to satisfy the objectives of the revolution is through a mass mobilisation and a challenge to the state structures.