

August 13, 2012

## **Egyptian Media: Military Shakeup 'Revolutionary'**

by VOA News

Egyptian media outlets are hailing as "revolutionary" a decision by President Mohamed Morsi to dismiss the once-powerful defense minister and curtail the military's authority.

"It can be said that starting today, the country is no longer under military rule," said Cairo resident Badawi Sayed Mahmoud. "Military rule is now over and Egypt will become a civil state in which everyone will be entitled to their rights."

On Sunday, President Morsi ordered Defense Minister Hussein Tantawi – a holdover from ousted President Hosni Mubarak's rule – to retire along with armed forces chief of staff Sami Enan. The president also canceled a constitutional declaration that had granted Tantawi and other top military officers wide powers.

Both Tantawi and Enan were named as presidential advisors and received top medals for their military service. The military has not publicly reacted to Morsi's decisions.

Morsi said he "did not intend to embarrass institutions," and that his decisions were for the benefit of Egypt and its people. He did not explain the timing of the decisions.

White House spokesman Jay Carney says the Obama Administration will reach out to Egypt's leadership.

"It's important for the Egyptian military and civilian leadership to work closely together," Carney told reporters on Monday. "We hope President's Morsi's announcements will serve the interests of the Egyptian people and maintain good relations with Egypt's neighbors."

### **Democratic Dream**

Essam Elarian, the head of President Morsi's Freedom and Justice Party, said Egyptians have been "dreaming of a fair democratic system for more than 60 years."

Some Morsi supporters celebrated in Tahrir Square late Sunday, but a VOA reporter in Cairo says there have not been a lot of people in the streets Monday, most likely due to the hot weather and the fasting associated with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

"I don't see a lot of people out in the streets despite what they were saying about supporters of the president in Tahrir Square," VOA's Edward Yeranian said from Cairo. "It was kind of a very small crowd compared to what we had last year when people were out there demonstrating. So I assume that because it's very hot and because it's Ramadan."

Not all Egyptians are happy with Morsi's decisions.

"These people led the country through very difficult times," said Egyptian commuter Ahmed Sayed. "They shouldn't be put on retirement all of a sudden."

Many in Egypt's upper economic brackets have been fearing Morsi's moves, Yeranian said.

"Certainly people in the bourgeoisie that I spoke with this morning were a little bit worried," he said. "Certainly people that were sort of on the fence are also wondering where this is going to go ultimately."

### **Impact Weighed**

Analyst Omar Ashour, who teaches political science at the University of Exeter in Britain, but lives in Cairo, says Morsi's politically assertive decision is a "positive step... which brings a balance to military-civilian relations."

"The ultimate test for a democratic transition is whether the elected civilian leader has meaningful control over the armed forces and the security apparatus," he said. Ashour added that "it is the first time in Egyptian history that a civilian president overruled the heads of the military and removed them this way."

But Egyptian editor and publisher Hisham Kassem has doubts about the president's decision and its implications on Egypt's political equation:

"Normally, I would have been thrilled that an end has come to military rule, given that the military is now accountable to civilian authority," Kassem said. "However, I am quite disturbed by what is coming: the (Muslim) Brotherhood entrenching themselves in power to this extent."

Several secular politicians told Arab media channels they were fearful the Muslim Brotherhood would extend its grip over the presidency, the parliament and the military and work to write a constitution in its favor.

It remains unclear if Morsi will try to rein in the country's courts, which have ruled against him in the past.

Some Egyptian commentators have expressed hopes since last year's revolution that the military would play a role of "check-and-balance" over Islamists in government, not unlike the role the military has played in Turkish politics.

But Kassem says "there was a bet in the past on the military being the guarantor of the civilian state. This is no longer the case."

### **Military Long in Power**

The Egyptian military seized power in 1952. Every leader for the past 60 years until President Morsi has been part of the military.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces ruled Egypt after Mubarak's ouster as president early last year, until Morsi's election this June. During that time, the military council approved a constitutional declaration granting its top commanders wide powers and scaled back presidential powers.

Morsi was shown on state TV late Sunday swearing in his new Defense Minister, Abdel Fattah al Sissi.

The new defense minister said he swears to protect the nation and its presidential system and to respect the constitution and the law, to defend the people's interests and the borders of the country.

It was not immediately clear if the president's decision would provoke a constitutional crisis. Field Marshall Tantawi and top generals of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces had given

themselves powers before the presidential election that some analysts compared to a “check-and-balance” system.

### **Sinai Backlash**

The unexpected moves by the president came as tensions mounted between him and top officers of the armed forces council. Photos showed Morsi and Field Marshall Tantawi tense and unsmiling as they visited the Sinai in recent days, during a government military operation against Islamist militants.

Morsi fired his intelligence chief and the governor of North Sinai last week.

That reorganization – which also extended to replacing the commander of the military police – came days after militants launched their bloodiest attack ever on the army in the Sinai Peninsula, killing 16 Egyptian border guards.