



As Morsi Is Removed From Power, What Are Next Steps for Egypt and Its Military?

Jul 3, 2013 6:05 PM EDT

Read the Full Transcript

JEFFREY BROWN:

This evening, the State Department started ordering nonessential diplomats and their families to leave Egypt.

And joining us again from Cairo tonight is Nancy Youssef of McClatchy Newspapers, and here with me, Michele Dunne, director of the Atlantic Council Center for the Middle East, and Samer Shehata, associate professor of international studies at the University of Oklahoma.

Well, Nancy Youssef, let me start with you. What was the mood in the streets tonight after this announcement?

NANCY YOUSSEF, McClatchy Newspapers:

Well, for the most part it was quite euphoric, and you can hear it behind me right now. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, nationwide have taken to the streets to celebrate this intervention by the military, which is the last remaining nationalist institution here.

But in the smaller pockets where Morsi supporters gathered, they rained gunfire down in anger. They talked about jihad. They talked about being prepared to die for this, that this was about defending their faith as much as it was about defending Morsi. But there's overwhelmingly joyful celebrations happening as we speak right now.

JEFFREY BROWN:

Now, Nancy, is there anything more known about the whereabouts of Morsi himself?

NANCY YOUSSEF:

No, we haven't heard anything. We saw a couple statements allegedly by him on Facebook calling this a military coup. His aides say he's been moved to an undisclosed location, but we don't know where that is. We don't know whether he will be arrested. There are rumors of that right now, one of many rumors spreading through Egypt right now.

The other thing we don't know about is where the senior aides of the Muslim Brotherhood are and what their fate is. There was a report earlier today that they had been forbidden from traveling out of Egypt. We will see what happens tomorrow, if there's any arrest or action by the military or by the police forces on the Brotherhood.

JEFFREY BROWN:

Now, Samer Shehata, a coup, but one with popular support? What have we seen? What's happened today?

SAMER SHEHATA, University of Oklahoma: Well, I think clearly the word coup has to be modified.

There was a debate among analysts whether what happened in 2011 against Mubarak was a revolution or whether it was an uprising, right, because the military got rid of Mubarak, but were still in power. And I think there is a legitimate debate about whether this was coup, certainly not in the classic sense of a few military officers taking out another leader.

There were millions of people out on the streets since June 30, and I think that's really the key point here. That is that in unprecedented numbers, they went out and they withdrew their support and essentially withdrew the legitimacy of Mohammed Morsi.

Now, this isn't an ideal situation, but nevertheless it's not simply a coup.

JEFFREY BROWN:

Michele Dunne, is it — should we see it as predominantly a sentiment against Morsi, pro-military? How divided a country is this at the moment?

MICHELE DUNNE, Director, Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East: There is this polarization between Islamists and non-Islamists and there are also elements of the old state that have been active here, not only the military, but the police and the state media and so forth.

I think what we saw happen was that a lot of the elements of the old system were willing to work with the Brotherhood and give Morsi a chance, but they felt that he failed. He failed to govern the country. He failed to stabilize the situation, to start moving the economy in the right direction.

And so they started withdrawing their support from him, the parts of the state, that is. And they aligned themselves with the secular opposition, and finally the military was the final piece.

JEFFREY BROWN:

Well, Samer Shehata, what's your sense of the military right now? How does it see itself? What's its role? What would be its next step?

SAMER SHEHATA:

Well, this is another amazing part of this story, right?

A year ago, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the military. Remember, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces were in charge of the country from the time Mubarak was ousted until Mr. Morsi was elected, and they did an abysmal job, and they killed protesters and there was — they didn't want to give up power.

Now I think, thanks to Mr. Morsi and the abysmal rule of his cohorts in the Brotherhood, the military's stock value, as it were, has risen significantly. So they are seen as the saviors of the country. We will see how long that lasts, of course. And that's likely to change.

JEFFREY BROWN:

Nancy Youssef, come in on that question, the role of the military. What are they saying right now and what are people saying about it and what the expectations are?

NANCY YOUSSEF:

Well, it's a very complicated and, I dare say, fickle relationship that Egyptians have with the military.

It's seen, as I mentioned, as Egypt's only nationalist force, an organization that represents every segment of society. Right now there's overwhelmingly euphoria that the military stepped in and broke this political impasse, which has defined the Morsi presidency almost from the minute he took office 368 days ago.

That said, the 2011 uprising that led to the fall of former President Egyptian — former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was in part about removing the military's grip on the country. Yes, there had been civilian presidents for the past six decades, but the military was a very key player in the governance of this country.

So the idea that people who were two years ago calling for the military to be pushed aside are now celebrating that they have intervened to usurp by all measures a legitimate election is stunning in a way.

JEFFREY BROWN:

What's your sense, Michele Dunne, about whether the military will hand back power, hold onto power? What next?

MICHELE DUNNE:

Well, in terms of the relationship with the people with the military, I do think it helps that the defense minister and the chief of staff were changed. Morsi changed them last August. So it's not the very same people who ruled the country for 18 months so unpopularity, as Samer said.

And when you speak to Egyptians, they say, oh, no, the military learned its lessons, it's not going to try to hold on to control this time. I don't know. What they did do this time is put a civilian figurehead out front right from the start, which is the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court. But he's not a well-known or a powerful figure.

They have also said they will put a technocratic cabinet in place, which also suggests not a powerful prime minister. So this is going to be military rule until there are new elections.

JEFFREY BROWN:

Well, Samer, what about the issue for the U.S. at this moment or the quandary? There's already talk about reviewing the aid that goes to Egypt, for example.

SAMER SHEHATA:

Well, I think that kind of language is going to come from Congress and not come from either — come from either the State Department or the White House. I don't think any of those officials are going to use the word coup, for example, because they clearly want to maintain the relationship with the military.

And I don't think — and I think this is correct — they don't want to come out against 14 million, 16 million, 18 million people demonstrating on the streets against what was a failed presidency.

JEFFREY BROWN:

What do you see as the American quandary, Michele Dunne?

MICHELE DUNNE:

I think it's the quandary that Samer says. I think United States has an opportunity now to try to press for a much more inclusive transition and, for example, that they should set the rules of the game before they hold new elections.

They made the mistake last time of holding both parliamentary and presidential elections before they had a new constitution. That caused huge problems. So I think the United States can try now to press for a more democratic transition, if the United States wants to, but they may continue to play a very minimal role and say, let's just keep our relationship with the military and stay out of this.

JEFFREY BROWN:

Well, Nancy Youssef, you started by telling us that we could hear people in the background still very late at night. Is the expectation that people stay in the streets? Is there a real fear of potential violence in the hours and days ahead?

NANCY YOUSSEF:

Yes, and we saw that in that there were military tanks and soldiers stationed all around the pro-Morsi supporters in the run-up to this announcement. There are military helicopters flying overhead now.

There was an effort to secure the situation even before the announcement started. And we have already heard of reports of violence in other provinces outside of Cairo. I personally saw clashes today between pro- and anti-Morsi camps. There is a sense of tension. And the language that's being used by Morsi supporters is worrisome.

Remember that Morsi just yesterday gave a speech in which he said he was willing to sacrifice his blood for this job, for the legitimacy, as he put it. And many of his supporters took that as a call for them to be prepared to die for this mission, that is, protecting the Morsi presidency.

So we will see if they step up tomorrow. The thing to note and what we have observed in the last few days is that the once-intimidating protests mounted by the Muslim Brotherhood have really been quite small compared to the anti-Morsi demonstrations, which speaks to the weakness when they have to confront opposition throughout the country and can't bus people in to various protests, let's say, in the capital or Alexandria.

JEFFREY BROWN:

All right, Nancy Youssef in Cairo, Samer Shehata and Michele Dunne here in Washington, thanks so much.

MICHELE DUNNE:

You're welcome.
