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## Falling Off a Cliff in Egypt

Paul R. Pillar

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The most important consequences of the Egyptian military's ouster of President Mohamed Morsi will become clear only over a long term. But for anyone who believes the coup was on balance a favorable event, an awful lot of favorable news will have to come out in the months ahead to offset what has already happened in the first few days after the generals moved. The most visible disturbing developments have occurred on two fronts, neither of which should have been altogether surprising.

One is a manifestation of the principle that closing political channels for more moderate Islamists increases the influence of less moderate Islamists. The immediate beneficiaries in this case are the hard-line Salafists of the Al Nour party, who are seizing the opportunity to assert themselves as their more moderate and compromising rivals in the Muslim Brotherhood are knocked off balance, with the army incarcerating their leaders. Al Nour includes the folks who want sharia to be *the* law of the land, unlike the Brotherhood, who in the writing of a constitution agreed with secularists that it ought only to be a source of principles in shaping the law. Al Nour so far can be said to be extreme only in objectives, not methods. Its assertiveness has included vetoing the candidacy for prime minister of former nuclear diplomat Mohamed El Baradei, who is the closest thing to a Western favorite among prominent Egyptian political figures.

The question of methods was raised by an even more disturbing development Monday morning, when dozens were killed as pro-Morsi protestors were gunned down in front of a military

headquarters. This is likely to be a defining event for Egypt similar to, even if on a smaller scale than, bloody suppression of protests in past history, from Saint Petersburg to Beijing. The bloodshed will be associated with whoever is put into office in Cairo with the sufferance of the military. Most worrisome is how such an event may lead to an all-around escalation of violence. One can read in several ways a statement the Muslim Brotherhood issued [4] after its supporters were felled in the street, calling for an “uprising” by Egyptians against those who would “steal their revolt” with tanks and massacres.

As with other phases of political upheaval in Egypt, the United States lacks the power to repair, much less control, the course of events there. The task of dealing with those events, if only as a matter of bilateral relations, has just become even more difficult. It now ought to be harder than ever to do the Egyptian military the favor of not calling their coup a coup.