It is troubling how predictable and expected the consequences of last week's decisions in Egypt have been. It is troubling because it indicates that those who made such decisions either had little or no idea that these consequences were likely -- or that they did not care about those consequences. In the midst of this crisis, however, it is important to see where there may be a path out and who can -- and who cannot -- help.

The public demand of the pro-Morsi camp (although privately, they are somewhat more nuanced) is the reinstatement of President Mohamed Morsi. In doing so, it is chasing after a scenario that is not only unlikely, but also dangerous. The best case for the July 3 military takeover was the aversion of widespread violence and civil war. This case has now been defeated -- widespread violence has already taken place, and while it is not in a civil war, Egypt is in a very dark place.

Nevertheless, the danger now is that even more violence could take place -- including if Morsi were reinstated. The calculus of the Muslim Brotherhood is that the majority of the population is either on its side, or on the fence between it and the military. The reality is that the majority of the population is solidly behind the military-backed interim government, and against the pro-Morsi camp, in spite of the incredible and obscene use of excessive force by the government's security forces to break up pro-Morsi protests. Indeed, what we have seen over the past few days is the phenomenon of spontaneous (and there will be non-spontaneous ones as well) civilian groups, voluntarily opposing Morsi supporters on the streets, due to organic antagonism vis-à-vis the pro-Morsi camp. They are creating neighborhood committees; tackling Morsi supporters in fights; and even establishing mobs, such as what were outside the al-Fatah mosque in the Ramsis area of Cairo this past Saturday. There were points that day when the security services themselves were *protecting* pro-Morsi protesters from an anti-Morsi mob -- the significance of that ought not to be underestimated.

Moreover, and most importantly, Morsi's reinstatement would be a direct challenge against all the institutions of the state: including the ones with the predominance of arms in the country. The military and the security services would resist such a reinstatement with all force

at their disposal -- and without a critical mass of civilian support on the pro-Morsi side, the fight would be decisively won against the pro-Morsi camp. The only other way for that reinstatement to occur would be for the army to replace Defense Minister General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and then back Morsi. Indeed, this is what some Muslim Brotherhood members are privately hoping for -- but their calculus in this regard is flawed. Sisi is tremendously popular within the army ranks -- and if the army were to split (which is highly dubious by any stretch of the imagination), Egypt could easily find itself in the midst of a real civil war. The reinstatement of Morsi is simply not on the table, if Egypt is to progress to safety.

But whether to reinstate Morsi is hardly the most pressing issue in Egypt -- it has gone far beyond that. The Egyptian state is in the midst of perhaps the most dangerous crisis in its modern history. The complete and utter failure of political leadership in Egypt has led to a showdown between the military and the security services on the one hand, and the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies on the other. These two sides are not equal -- the former is responsible for maintaining the security of the state as a whole, and all citizens individually, regardless of their political affiliations, while the latter is responsible for adhering to the law, as individuals, and as a group. Both "sides" have responsibilities to live up to -- but the consequence of the Muslim Brotherhood failing its responsibilities cannot be compared to the failure of the state doing the same.

The future of politics in Egypt, along with the regional and international repercussions that accompany it, directly depends on how this crisis is resolved. The same path that was open before this terrible turn of events is still open. The basic outlines of a political accommodation are still there for everyone to grasp. An interim government is unsustainable, and means for little or no accountability of anyone -- and the reinstatement of Morsi is also a bad move. Fresh presidential elections under the watch of international observers are needed as soon as possible, but that is only a starting point. Consensus is key to unlocking Egypt's deadlock -- and that demands an **alternative vote system** for the presidency. Whoever becomes Egypt's next civilian president must have the largest possible mandate and be best positioned within a vote system in which the winner is the first or second choice out of many candidates.

That consensus cannot be established without the full participation of all political forces in the country -- and that means the Muslim Brotherhood, popular or not, must be permitted to have political representation as a group. The interim government has already said as much, while reserving the right to prosecute individuals for crimes -- so be it, if the crimes are investigated in a transparent and just manner. But the government is sending mixed messages in this regard completely -- it talks of disbanding the organization, and paints its members indiscriminately as terrorists. But the exclusion of a group that has the support of around 15 percent of the adult population is not something that ought to be considered lightly. If the Muslim Brotherhood as a group chooses to stay out, as it chose as a group to create a single political party, then it cannot be forced in -- but every step must be taken from the side of the state to make inclusion a reality.

Finally, the political process cannot move forward with an impending threat of violence within the country. The demands of the January 25 revolution were "bread, freedom, social justice and human dignity" -- and those demands were made on "Police Day." The reform and restructuring of the Ministry of Interior, with all of its security apparatuses, must be a priority for the government at present. Christian communities of Egypt and their churches must receive the protection of the state, which has been severely lacking. Security sector reform has been necessary for years, but no one has had the desire or political will to take it on. The state's use of excessive force resulting in the mass killing of hundreds of people over the past few days has been as disastrous as was predicted -- and excessive force will be used again. It was used under Hosni Mubarak, Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, Morsi, and every authority in Egypt in recent memory. Reforming the security sector is not an option. It is a dire necessity.

These basic details are not the main issue -- the issue is who will be able to get all parties within Egypt to confer on the basis of such principles. Few in the country, if any, qualify as institutions or individuals that have the potential to bring the parties together. Al-Azhar University *may* qualify, as Azhar's Grand Imam voiced opposition to and dissent against the forced dispersal of the pro-Morsi sit-ins by the government -- but the Muslim Brotherhood will regard

him as suspect, considering his support for the military intervention on July 3. Nevertheless, Ahmed al-Tayeb carries substantial weight -- and in the midst of such a polarized society, he is probably one of the few Egyptians left who has the respect of the state's institutions, and stood against the violence of the last few days. If he hosts an initiative with one of his most senior advisors, Hassan Shafei (a noted scholar in his own right who has been deeply critical of the last few weeks), this may be a venue for constructive dialogue. Within that dialogue also present will likely be Amr Hamzawy (a liberal politician who has been consistent throughout), Mohamed ElBaradei (the now former vice president), Selim al-Awaa (a more centrist Islamist figure), Nabil el-Arabi (the secretary general of the Arab League) and the former Muslim Brotherhood figure, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, who can act as decent mediators between the multiple sides.

But Egypt does not operate in a vacuum -- and international mediation, alongside national media, may be helpful, at the invitation of the national mediation. A multilateral discussion that brings some international actors together that have some influence on different parties to this emerging conflict, such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and the European Union, on the same page may also be useful. Other countries that are less involved in Egypt, but are genuinely neutral brokers, such as Norway, should also be brought into the discussion.

The United States may be a glaring omission -- but that omission is one of design, as the United States has shown itself to be remarkably unpopular on both sides of the divide in Egypt. It ought to stay on the sidelines this time around, and at best engage those non-Egyptian parties involved in the international mediation.

None of this will be easy -- and there will be compromises to be made that few will find assuring, but the most important thing at present is Egypt's stability and the prevention of more loss of life. The only way forward in that regard is dialogue and negotiation. Dialogue when it is non-advantageous to a party's position is always risky -- but the danger of *not* engaging in dialogue at the present time is certainly riskier. The price of political failure in Egypt increases -- in blood.