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July 4, 2013: The Egyptian Disaster for Democracy

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Title: The Egyptian Disaster for Democracy

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7/4/2013—Happy Fourth of July. How ironic it is that on this day celebrating American independence and the creation of the first large-scale democracy in human history, so many Americans are pleased that the army coup in Egypt. Yes there were many demonstrators, maybe even more than voted for Morsi in the first place. But democracy is not a poll. Democracy also has to do with regular procedures. We do not ask the Army to depose an unpopular president in the United States. We wait for the next election. Those celebrating the action of the Army today, may rue the day tomorrow, when the Army frustrates their democratic success. I had to laugh at the idea that the Army deposing a popularly elected president could be anything but a coup. I read and heard the comment, some people are calling it a coup. What else, exactly, could it be? There is a reason of course why some Americans are celebrating the Egyptian Army's action. Morsi was an Islamist. He represented the interests of the Egyptian Brotherhood. Many Americans, liberals and conservatives for differing reasons, oppose even democratically elected Islamist regimes. They felt that way about Morsi. They feel that way about Turkey. But why cannot a majority of Egyptians wish to be led by an Islamist government? Yes, there are things that a democratic government may not do. But Morsi had not ended freedom of speech or of the press. He had not canceled future elections. He was carrying out unpopular policies. His party would be defeated eventually. And then, maybe, Islam would really have had to come to terms with democracy. Not now. In a very good report on NPR, I heard an academic expert on the Middle East state that the real winner in Egypt today is Al Qaeda. The real controversy in Islam was between defenders of democracy, like the Brotherhood, and those promoting violence, like Al Qaeda. Well, how many Muslims will now turn to violence? Americans have not been able to figure out the proper role and limits on religion in public life. In today's Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, there is a full-page ad on A14 the back page of the first section stating in large letters In God We Trust. The ad points out that presidents and our founding fathers supported religion in general and Christianity in particular as central to popular government. Today, we doubt that. But I hope the working out of that relationship will not be left up to the Army, but to democracy itself.