Analysis of regime change: The case of Egypt

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Abstract--Egypt experienced military dictatorship regimes from 1952-2011. The revolution of January 25, 2011 deposed the last dictator who held power for over 30 years. However, the removal of the head of the state doesn't imply radical changes in the structure of governance. The transition period between the two regimes is quite difficult. This is particularly so as the old regime rendered the few political parties ineffective; and eroded any potential for the emergence of leaders. Therefore, with indifferent elite, and the masses demanding their basic needs including freedom, the army had to be again in control. The agenda this time is to follow a road map to construct a free and democratic political system. The objective of this paper is to provide an analysis of the regime change in Egypt and outline some criteria to judge the emerging new order.

***Keywords*: regime; Mubarak, revolution; transition**

I. *Introduction*

Over the past century, the political systems which were developed in the Middle East region have been of the authoritarian type despite their claim to be democratic. This applies to the republics as well as to the kingdoms in the area. Political and economic developments have been quite limited, with more negative than positive outcomes. They have not been in line with the potential of the countries, or the aspirations of their populations. As a result, the region, particularly the Arab countries, became on the wrong side of history.

As of late 2010 an uprising started in Tunis and by 2011 the Egyptian revolution started. This was followed by the uprising in Libya. The so called "Arab-Spring" spread to Yemen and Syria but the outcome in these two countries remains uncertain. Regime change was effected in Tunis and Egypt in a relatively peaceful ways while the change in Libya was quite bloody and required the military intervention of the international community. Both dictators in Tunis and Egypt held absolute power for over 30 years, while the Libyan one managed to rule the country for 42 years. The key characteristics of the three countries at the time of the revolutions are outlined in Table 1.

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TABLE 1. KEY INDICATORS FOR EGYPT, TUNIS AND LIBYA

Indicator	*Egypt*	*Tunis*	*Libya*
Area (000' sq. km)	1.001	164	1759540
Population (Million)	82	10	6.5
Adult Literacy rate % ages 15 years & older	66%	78%	87%
Population below $2 a day	18.4%	12.8%	N/A
GNI per Capita US$	1.800	3.290	11.590

The Success of the revolutions in the three countries in deposing the long-time dictators did not lead to the desired democratic systems which were hoped for. A long and difficult transition process has started and its outcome is not quite certain. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the factors which led to the Revolution of January 25, 2011 and to outline the determinants for the success of the transition stage and the emerging new regimes.

II. Historical Overview

In a comprehensive and analytical study of Egyptian politics, Maye Kassem, points out that "Since the military coup d'etat of 23 July 1952, the formal political structure in Egypt has changed considerably. The populist-socialist single-party system established under Nasser has been replaced by a political framework in which opposition parties have been legally functioning since 1976. Furthermore, the introduction of the infitah (the economic open-door policy) in 1974 and the adoption of an economic reform and structural adjustment program (ERSAP) in 1991 have reinforced the change of direction adopted by the post- 1952 regime over the years." (Kassem 2004, 1).

Kassem dismisses that these trends led Egypt to be a maturing democracy. Indeed, personal authoritarian rule in Egypt survives and has been maintained for decades. Indicative of this, is recognized as the implementation of a multiparty arena has not affected the outcome of government. "The formal branches of government remain subservient to the overwhelming domination of the executive, and the development of autonomous groupings and constituencies remains hindered and weak. In addition, the existence of Western and particularly U.S. support of the regime since the 1970s has allowed the political system in Egypt to adopt disparate liberal guises while in fact doing little to encourage genuine change with regard to the country's personal authoritarian system of rule. While the Nassar, Sadat, and Mubarak regimes have had their own distinct characteristics, the nature of personal authoritarian rule in the presidency has remained unchanged during all three eras." (Kassem, 1). Therefore, if Egypt has been under personal authoritarian rule

for the past sixty years, why was the Mubarak regime ripe for collapse in 2011?

The combination of several factors seems to have made the collapse of the system inevitable. The question was when and how? The demonstrations which started on January 25, 2011 could have been crushed but at a very high cost in terms of human lives which the world community would not have been able to tolerate. Moreover, the disintegration of the sizable security forces, estimated to exceed a million, on January 28, 2011; and the army distancing itself from the presidency forced the resignation of President Mubarak. A new era has started and the next few years will show whether a new system is emerging or the old system remains under a new president or dictator.

III. Social and Economic Changes

Since 1952, the social and economic structure of the Egyptian society has been subjected to major changes. The economic policies pursued under the Nasser regime rested on two pillars. The first was a dramatic reform of Egypt's grossly unequal pattern of land ownership. The second pillar of Nasser economic policies was the establishment of the public sector as a means of transferring ownership of productive assets from a small group of capitalists to the public at large and as a vehicle for accelerating industrialization, employment and growth. Moreover, free education, free health care, subsidies for staple food items, price controls, minimum wages, generous labor laws and guaranteed employment for school graduates, have resulted in narrowing the very wide income inequalities in the society. "By these measures, the regime created a strong social base to support its policies." (Farah,38). Tarek Osman considers that "Nasser's greatest social achievement was to build his power base on a philosophical imperative: the need to win a sweeping mandate from the people. This bottom up approach aimed to translate the desires and wants of the people into state policies and national socio-economic strategies. It was, the first time in Egyptian history that a "pharaoh" had sought to serve the people and adopted their agenda rather than imposed his on them (Osman, 47). Nasser failed, however, to use that mandate to transform his (and his people's) dreams into lasting institutions; he failed to convert his revolution into a state." (Osman, 68).

The main reason Nasser could not establish a state was that all his socio- economic strategies and policies were personified in him; intentionally or not. He portrayed his project as starting from scratch and thus severing it from its historical context. When he ceased to exist, the mandate of the people was withdrawn and the Nasserist project had no institutional legitimacy to sustain it. However, the legacy of Nasser and his project remains in the minds of many Egyptians despite the changes introduced by Sadat and Mubarak. Sadat was pursuing a vision of a new Egypt and he did not live long to realize it. Mubarak had no vision but he stayed for 30 years overlooking the decline of Egypt in all spheres.

IV. Factors for Mubarak's Decline

The main factors behind the decline and collapse of the Mubarak's regime may be summarized in the following paragraphs.

- Since 1952, the military establishment has provided the framework within which Egyptian presidents' rule. Despite Nasser's popularity and appeal, Sadat's transformative changes and Mubarak's long reign, all three have relied on their military credentials and the unquestioned support of the military establishment to retain and exercise power. Over the past decade, the liberal capitalist elite, led by the President's son, has emerged as a power group working for Gamal Mubarak's replacing his father in the presidency. The question which was debated in private and in the opposition papers – can the military support such a move? To many analysts this did not seem likely.

- The powers of the liberal capitalist elite, particularly over the economic sectors have risen sharply since 2000. The army's role has been confined to the areas of state sovereignty. The balance of power between the military and the capitalist elite has been achieved through the presence of Mubarak with his unrivalled influence and ability to balance conflicting interests. But who can perform that role if and when Mubarak is gone and his son assumes power? While it seemed doubtful that the military may impose itself on the country's future directly, there was a feeling or a suspicion that it may lend support to a proven figure from outside the liberal capitalist camp and thus satisfy the people desire to see real change. The year 2011 was expected to present such an opportunity if a credible candidate for the presidential election emerges.

- Globalization, free media, satellite channels and the internet have opened up political debates in the society and the formation of political groups despite the emergency law and the security apparatus. The society's dominant force of young people developed a strong feeling that the future is theirs and they have to shape it away from their aging and ineffective leadership. This is quite a departure from the conventional view that Egyptian history and traditions predisposes Egyptians to expect and accept authoritarian rule. The young generations did not seem to have confidence in the country institutional structure to develop and guarantee a smooth and clear transfer of power once Mubarak goes. Therefore, a feeling that the responsibility for change is theirs has developed as noted from the social media in 2009, 2010, and 2011.

- In the past few years, many analysts came to believe that Egypt has completed a full circle as it returned after sixty years of failed experimentation to the pre 1952 era: staggering inequality, political paralysis, a potentially hereditary regime and an unstable situation

in which the army holds the key levers of power (Osman, 232). This view combined with the rising anger and demonstrations could herald an era of chaos and a bloody rebellion by the deprived groups. Therefore, the desire for a change of the status quo became marked. The results of the 2010 parliamentary elections delivered a devastating blow to the hopes of those who counted on the regime reforming itself, at least, moderately, to meet partly the aspirations of the masses for genuine change.

- The adoption of the International Monetary Fund/World Bank economic reform programs since the 1990's and the "new thinking" of Mubarak National Democratic Party in 2000's did not have tangible positive effects on the ordinary citizen. Indeed the conditions of the country's poor and the middle class have deteriorated considerably. It began to be clear to many that even a miracle will not change their fortunes in their life time. They realized that there is no exist from the "bottle neck" marking the past 30 years. The question which was on many minds – why do we support a regime which is making us poorer while few become richer by the day? A related one is if our lives are doomed by the regime should not we save the lives of our children?

- Egypt's foreign policy over the past thirty years has been based on the decision to become a pillar of the Pax Americana in the Middle East. This doctrine has been workable, despite immense popular rejection, because of Mubarak authority and control. Many citizens were appalled by and opposed Egypt's position regarding the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003; the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006; and the Israeli's war on Gaza in 2008/2009. There was no plausible explanation why Egypt maintains full diplomatic ties with Israel but can not establish minimum relations with Iran. Egypt participation in the blockade of Gaza was viewed as deplorable by all humanitarian and legal standards. This deep dissatisfaction with the regime's foreign policy has always been matched with the desire to see Egypt playing its leading role in the geostrategic scene of the Middle East. A change of regime was the only way to realize and regain Egypt's leadership and soft power.

- The failure of the Mubarak regime to protect the most important national Egyptian interest in Africa i.e. the Nile. This has been quite shocking, painful and felt throughout the country. The Nile water is vital for the survival of Egypt and the Egyptians. In April 2010, six of the River Nile Source Countries signed an agreement that effectively challenges Egypt's historical rights in the Nile Water. Now the country has to face this challenge which was ignored for decades by the shortsightedness of the foreign policy. This failure made many think that the regime is not only ineffective but that it is damaging the foundation of the state as known from ancient times. The breakup

of the Sudan and the negative and indifferent role played by Egypt in that country intensified the call for a regime change.

- Contrary to Nasser and Sadat, Mubarak isolated himself from the people and their problems. His reliance centered on the security agencies and believing that the solutions to the country's many fundamental problems lies exclusively in long term economic reforms. Political stability to him meant no change and some ministers kept their posts for decades. People realized that stagnation is and will remain the order of the day and that some radical measures are needed to effect the desired change.

- The privatization of state owned enterprises added to the problems surrounding worker insecurity and increasing unemployment. In order to sell state enterprises, the government resorted to multiple tactics to downsize the labor force. The sale of public companies raised many questions regarding the adequacy of the price and the future of the workers and the industry. It was obvious that the government wants to get rid of the public sector and the labor at any cost. Charges of corruption at the highest levels spread and so did the grievances of the labor force whether dismissed or retained.

- The extreme disparity in wages which started in 2000 was viewed as a form of legalized corruption. A young graduate could earn 30-50 times than his colleague if he had the right connections. A category of so called advisers were appointed in many ministries and public institutions at exhorbant salaries unheard of in the history of Egypt. Heads of banks received monthly payments in millions despite their limited qualifications and mediocre performance. This legalized abuses and corruption led to a wide-spread demoralization and a kind of consensus that this can not go on for much longer.

Tarek Osman summarizes the situation, a year before the revolution, as follows "In the last thirty years, the Egyptian regime has aimed to transform the country by embracing a distorted form of liberal capitalism and a relentlessly realist world outlook. The former is on the verge of blowing up from the internal pressures of poverty and anger and the latter seems lost in an avalanche of rejection and resentment, the tail end of which Egypt is still experiencing. Now, after more than three decades without a direction, a consensus, or even a dream, the country needs a new project. The waters of the Nile that slink between muddy banks and twirl through creamy sand have been stagnant for a long time; the 'eternal brown land' needs a deluge of energy. Young Egyptians need to chart their route to the future." (Osman, 245)

V. **The Transition Stage**

The mass demonstration which caused the collapse of the Mubarak rule consisted of very diversified groups covering all segments of the Egyptian society. They represented all ages,

genders, religions and political orientations. They had one clear objective which united them all and that is to over throw Mubarak. There was no leadership and no plans for the future in the post Mubarak era. The slogans which were raised, namely: bread, liberty and social justice represented their common aspirations but there were no blue prints and/or leaders who can translate them into policies and actions. The army which was neutral during the mass demonstrations and who was viewed as implicitly supporting the revolution was called upon by Mubarak to assume the management of the country as he stepped down on Feb 11, 2011. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), assumed both the executive and the legislative powers and pledged a short transition period of six months for the establishment of the new order. The six months were extended to eighteen months and many suspected that the SCAF was stalling to remain in power.

The transition period was an unplanned, confused and ambiguous process. SCAF decided that elections for the People's Assembly and the Presidency take place before a new constitution can be drafted. This alienated several segments of the society who considered that a broad-based supported constitution is the first order of the day. Disagreement on this and other issues led to street clashes between the Army and demonstrators with hundreds dead and thousands jailed. The government was quite ineffective and economic and security concerns became alarming for most citizens. As a result, it was realized by SCAF that their continuity in power was not feasible and it decided to cede power once elections are completed. It is to the credit of SCAF that free and fair elections were held for the first time since 1952. However, the newly elected People's Assembly was dissolved by the Supreme Constitutional Court and the first Civilian Egyptian President assumed his post on June, 30, 2012. He managed to end the role of SCAF and retire most of its members. A new constitution was prepared and approved by a referendum in December 2012.

The management style and actions of the President were very disappointing. It was felt that Egyptians of all religious and ideological stripes, should be represented and governed by a set of rules everyone can respect. Until then, Egypt will fail to cope with its many economic, social and political difficulties. The masses, on the other hand, were feeling the strain of the deteriorating economic conditions, and realizing that their revolution did not change the old order. The counter revolution forces were re-grouping and seem determined to model the emerging new order on similar lines of the old one to protect and develop their interests. Therefore by 2013, the transition period was far from complete and there was so much uncertainty about its outcome. Brown considered that "Egypt's transition may be lurching towards a more pluralist democracy, prolonged instability, renewed authoritarianism or toward a kind of delegative democracy in which a leader with a popular mandate is able to rule without oversight and accountability" (Brown, 1).

There were frequent and persistent calls for a second revolution which added more to the uncertainty about the future. Such calls were based on the belief that the first revolution was emptied of its contents by SCAF, the President's party and the remnants of the old regime. Huge demonstrations took to the streets on June 30, 2013 demanding an early presidential election. There were also counter demonstrations by those supporting the President. On July 3, 2013, the Army felt it is necessary to move in and take full control. A road map was declared specifying the steps to be followed to return to democratic order. An interim President and Cabinet were appointed and a new constitution was drafted and voted upon in January 2014. New Presidential elections will be held in late May 2014and it is expected that the former defense minister will overwhelmingly win. Elections for the parliament will take place in the second half of 2014.

VI. Determinants of a Responsive Political System

The Success of the transition stage in developing a political system which is responsive to the social and economic aspirations of the people may be assessed by a number of considerations outlined in the following paragraphs.

A. The relationship between political ideas and politics

The outlook of the political leaders and their followers is conditioned by the cumulative historical experience of their respective countries. This experience creates varying degrees of receptivity to political ideologies. A political system is effective to the extent that the history behind it has brought about an underlying consensus on an ideology or a set of beliefs, to the extent that these beliefs legitimize the system, and to the extent that they furnish the leaders with a hierarchy of goals to guide policy choices and a reasonably effective method of analyzing policy problems. Politics is not only the exercise of power; it is also a matter of will. An outlook which involves unrealistic goals, or no goals at all, or which rests on irrelevant analytical categories, can be a guide to disaster (Iraq; Somalia; Libya; …etc)

B. The political system and the individual

Each political system shapes and is shaped by the society of which it is a part. The political system imposes demands on the member of society. The extent to which the latter accept and respond to them is determined largely by the processes through which individuals are turned into citizens. In addition, the members of a modern society both participate in the political system and exercise some controls over it. The forms of participation and control and the nature of the balance between them are key elements in the strength of the system. In every society, also, there are varying degrees of dissatisfaction and indifference, with which the political system must have means of coping. (Most Middle East countries use force as the basic means to keep the relationship between the political system and the individual).

C. *The character of the political leadership*

The key questions here concern the education and training of the leadership, the sources from which it is recruited, the methods of advancement up the political ladder, the organizational framework of leadership, and the regularity of turnover and circulation among leaders. A political system in which leaders are recruited by birth rather than by achievement and from a small number of families rather than from society at large, who are dilettantes rather than professionals in politics, who advance to the top through family connections, and who either grow old and stale in office or circulate through offices in a rapid game of musical chairs, is weaker than one where these conditions do not prevail. (The strength and effectiveness of all the political systems in the Middle East are impaired by this factor per se).

D. *The political system and the processes of policy making*

Political leaders in any country exercise power by applying their values and ideologies to the processes of policy making. Each system must have ways of recognizing the problems confronting society, of mobilizing support for alternative solutions to them, of formulating the issues for decision, and of implementing the policies once they have been decided upon. To govern is to choose. The processes of policy making affect the choices (or the lack of choices) of the political leaders. The same processes determine to what extent policies in one area are coordinated with policies in other areas and the speed and flexibility with which new policies can be introduced. (All Middle Eastern countries are lacking in processes of policy making).

The new order in Egypt will emerge over a number of years possibly a decade or so. It is hoped that Egypt will have a liberal democratic system which promotes growth and social justice as its key objectives.

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"In countries where access to power means access to resources and services, the stakes can become very high and elections highly charged."

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