



Turmoil in Egypt

The first, and the most benign from our point of view, is that Mubarak resigns and that his newly appointed Vice President, 74-year-old trusted aide and head of Intelligence, Omar Suleiman, becomes temporary head of state with the help of the Army. Then a distinguished group of Egyptian jurists drafts a new constitution, modeled much after our own, to permit the formation of political parties, guaranteeing freedom of religion and the press, and a free-market economic system. Elections then take place, and a new Parliament is formed representing the diverse groups in Egyptian society.



Such an outcome would establish political and religious freedom, social stability, and an economy based on free-market principles. Egypt would continue to honor its peace treaty with Israel and continue to fight terrorism. It would continue to be an ally of the United States.

This rosy scenario is perhaps too good to become reality. But what is significant is that, so far, no particular extreme leader has taken front stage in this uprising. It seems to have been generated by popular discontent and the use of the Internet's social networks as the means of communication. So it is hoped that the aim of the uprising is to get rid of one dictatorship and not replace it with another.

There is no reason to believe that the Egyptians want to become the slaves of a theocratic state run by religious fanatics as in Iran. They probably watched the recent uprising in Iran on the Internet and now believe that if the Iranians were brave enough to oppose their rulers, that Egyptians could do the same. The Egyptians have a rich, secular culture, albeit dominantly Islamic, but they have a free spirit that will not tolerate another dictatorship.

As for who started all of this, one Egyptian observer, Ahmad Shokr, writes in a liberal blog, Democracy Now, "The people who initiated the protest call are largely a group of youth activists that have been organizing through social media, mostly through Facebook. They started a Facebook page to call for this demonstration, which immediately received just an outpouring of support. Tens of thousands of people signed up and expressed support for the demonstration, inspired largely by the events of Tunisia a few weeks ago. So this was a youth-led spontaneous movement that's being fueled by the anger of young people across Egypt."

Meanwhile, in the hope of appeasing the rioters, Mubarak fired his old Cabinet and created a new one, and replaced his Interior Minister, head of internal security, with a retired police general, Mahmoud Wagdi. Still, the new Cabinet is unlikely to satisfy the thousands of protesters demanding the ouster of Mubarak and his entire regime.

So far, the only prominent Egyptian who has been mentioned as a possible mediator in all of this is Mohamed ElBaradei, the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency. It has been reported that on Friday he was surrounded at a mosque by protesters seeking his support and that he urged



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Mubarak to resign. There has also been talk about the Muslim Brotherhood, which is banned in Egypt, as taking part in the creation of a new government. But it is only based on rumor.

But who knows? This uprising could turn out to be quite anti-American. So let us consider another scenario. Mubarak resigns, but the people reject the Vice President as the new head of state and continue their demonstrations and riots until someone else, perhaps a jihadist, becomes the temporary head of state. This new leader is anti-American and wants to break Egypt's relations with Israel. He believes that Egypt should join the jihad against the West and become an ally of Iran.

Is such a scenario possible? Yes, but unlikely. Egypt has become too Westernized. The fact that the Internet social networks have played such an important role in all of this, indicates that Egyptians are 21st-century, not fifth-century, oriented. What they want are the benefits that the 21st century have to offer. But this disaffected youth may also be socialist in their ideology. They would want their new government to be like the socialist states in Europe. They may consider capitalism to be an evil form of economy, even though many of the small businesses in Egypt are expressions of economic freedom: capitalism.

Meanwhile, I'd be very happy to see the new Vice President, Omar Suleiman, become head of a new Egyptian government. He rose through the ranks of the military, has been Egypt's intelligence chief for nearly two decades. He has never been one of the regime's highly visible, public figures. Instead, Suleiman has played a behind-the-scenes role as the top official in charge of some of the most important issues facing the Egyptian state.

He was entrusted with the critical relations with the United States, Israel, the Palestinians, and neighboring Sudan. He has also been Egypt's point man in mediating between Israel and the Palestinians and between the rival Palestinian factions themselves.

In other words, if he were accepted by the demonstrators as the new Egyptian leader, if only temporarily, it would be a good sign.



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