



Egypt's Present Path

With turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa continuing to spread in the wake of the departure of Egypt's longtime dictator and U.S. stooge Hosni Mubarak, it is difficult to predict the short-term, let alone the long-term, future for that profoundly troubled region. Inspired by the relative ease and nonviolence with which determined resistance managed to unseat long-entrenched dictatorships, first in Tunisia and then in Egypt, people elsewhere in the Arab world are finding the struggle for self-emancipation much tougher slogging.



AP Images

At the time of this writing, Libya's thuggish autocrat, Moammar Ghadafi — once characterized by President Ronald Reagan as a "barbarian" and a "flake" — is presiding over the wholesale slaughter of his own citizenry, apparently determined to make a desolation of that unhappy nation rather than relinquish power. Government goons in Yemen and Bahrain have been killing unarmed protesters as well, showing the true face of America's allies in the Middle East. Whatever the outcome of those bloody struggles, Egypt, at least, appears irrevocably on a new path, one that leads away from decades of secret police, economic stagnation, and martial law. But it is by no means certain that Egypt will become a shimmering oasis of liberty, limited government, and economic prosperity; such an outcome — like many oases that beckon to thirsty travelers in the Sahara — is likely to prove a desert mirage.

The Mirage

First, the illusion: Following the surprise ouster of Tunisian autocrat Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Egyptians rose up en masse and demanded that their longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak, in charge of Egypt since the assassination of his predecessor, Anwar Sadat, in 1981, resign. After several days of peaceful demonstrations, Mubarak unleashed his thugs to attempt to browbeat the insurrectionists into giving up. Instead, after several more days of heroic resistance, Mubarak bowed to the demands of the people of Egypt and stepped down. An interim government under Egypt's military is now guiding Egypt toward Western-style political reforms and elections, as democratic fervor flowers across the jewel of the Nile. That, at least, is the official media narrative.

To be sure, the yearning for liberty is sincere for many Egyptians old and young, many of whom braved bullets and nightsticks to get their message across. At the same time, the Egyptian military — in stark contrast to the horrors being unleashed on Libya by her mad dictator — generally conducted itself professionally and sought to protect the protesters from the mobs of armed thugs trying to stir up violence.

But behind the scenes, the usual suspects have been working to ensure that Egypt's revolution is kept within lines acceptable to Western elites. And that means replacing the old suffocating, police-state socialism of the Mubarak government with more modern, cosmetically pleasing socialism beloved of



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on April 4, 2011

Published in the issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 27, No. 07

European and North American internationalists. The new Egypt will have fewer restraints on certain personal liberties like freedom of speech and perhaps even religion — but at a cost of more thorough absorption into the new world political, financial, and legal order centered on the United Nations.

Significantly, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the New York-based foreign policy establishment, seems to have been preparing for a changing of the guard in Egypt for at least a year. Last March *Foreign Affairs*, the CFR's flagship journal, in an article by Steven A. Cook, Hasib J. Sabbagh senior fellow for Middle East studies at the CFR, pointed out that change was imminent in Egypt because of Mubarak's advancing age and failing health. Although Mubarak's son Gamal was the most likely successor, the CFR had other ideas. In the coming crisis of succession, wrote Cook, Egypt's "hero" was likely to be Mohamed ElBaradei, an Egyptian and longtime UN insider who had only recently begun getting involved in the politics of his homeland.

Anyone who has followed the debate over nuclear weapons in the Middle East will be familiar with the name of ElBaradei. The former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it was ElBaradei who sought to convince the Bush administration that Saddam Hussein's Iraq did not possess nuclear weapons nor was seeking to acquire them.

In his third and final term at the head of the IAEA, ElBaradei was at odds with the Bush administration over Iran's nuclear program. His agency had found no evidence that the Iranians were actively working to develop nuclear weapons, he said, and condemned potential military action against Iran. He has also condemned the nuclear "double standard" embraced by the United States and other nuclear nations. "We must abandon the unworkable notion," he wrote in a *New York Times* editorial in 2004, "that it is morally reprehensible for some countries to pursue weapons of mass destruction, yet morally acceptable for others to rely on them for security — and indeed to continue to refine their capacities and postulate plans for their use." For his contributions to nuclear non-proliferation, ElBaradei won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

Regarding ElBaradei's visit to his homeland in February 2010 (only a month before Cook's article appeared in *Foreign Affairs*), Cook characterized ElBaradei as a swashbuckling, charismatic reformer embraced by hopeful Egyptians:

ElBaradei has caused a political sensation since his plane touched down in Cairo. Foreign news outlets estimated that as many as one thousand Egyptians turned out to welcome him home at Cairo's airport — and to implore him to run for president in Egypt's 2011 elections (a significant number given the government's record of intimidation and violence).

ElBaradei did not douse his supporters' hopes. He coyly told the Egyptian and foreign press that he would consider running if the Egyptian government enacted electoral and party reforms to ensure truly free and fair elections. At the same time, he formed a new political organization called the National Front for Change, which encompasses a broad swath of Egypt's fractious but largely ineffective opposition movement.

Barely a month after Cook's laudatory piece, ElBaradei, speaking at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, indicated that he was "looking for a job" and wanted to be an "agent of change and an advocate for democracy" in Egypt. No sooner had the anti-Mubarak protests erupted in January than ElBaradei flew back to Egypt and began participating in the protests on Tahrir Square. Fulminating



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against Hosni Mubarak's attempts to cling to power, ElBaradei predicted that a future democratic Egypt would be drawn much closer to the United States in "a better relationship ... based on respect and equity."

Globalist Fraternity

By "United States," ElBaradei more likely has in mind the foreign policy establishment based at the Council on Foreign Relations than the American people or their elected representatives. The CFR, for its part, already has boots on the ground in Egypt. In his blog, Steven Cook reported on January 26 that he had been "helping to shepherd a group of CFR members around Cairo the last few days," meeting with Egyptian government officials and in general getting the lay of the land amidst the swelling protests that would soon unseat the Mubarak government. It is interesting to note that the first major protest against the Mubarak government was on January 25, long before the movement forced Mubarak's ouster. Thus the unnamed cadre of CFR members who began their Egyptian tour a "few days" before January 26 would in fact have begun their mission before the protests were even underway.

Another CFR member and former U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, Frank G. Wisner, was dispatched to Egypt by President Obama during the protests to convey the Obama administration's view that Mubarak should step down in the best interest of Egypt (as well as, presumably, the interests of the "global community" whom men like Wisner purport to represent). Wisner was not successful in persuading Mubarak, who unleashed his now infamous and unsuccessful crackdown just a few days after Wisner's visit. Wisner, meanwhile, speaking in Europe on the very day when Mubarak's camel-mounted goons attacked protesters in Cairo, opined that Mubarak should stay in power in the short term in the interest of "stability." Egyptians, as we have witnessed, weren't having any of it, but Wisner has since been revealed to have been less than a neutral party. Although very popular in Egypt during his term as U.S. Ambassador, Wisner has subsequently been employed prominently in a firm that has lobbied on behalf of the Egyptian government, and also sits on the board of Egypt's largest bank. Such are the unexpected swaths of influence controlled by the CFR's global and globalist network.

The globalist fraternity has other prominent connections in Egypt besides ElBaradei. Former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, an Egyptian diplomat whose one term as the head of the UN back in the mid-nineties was fraught with controversy, also wants to be involved in the reconstruction of Egypt. Boutros-Ghali, be it recalled, was widely criticized for his inaction in the face of the Rwandan genocide and the Yugoslav civil war, both of which occurred on his watch. When his name was submitted for a second term as Secretary-General, the United States vetoed his candidacy. However, Boutros-Ghali has continued to be active in the push for global governance. He occupies a high post at the Hague Academy of International Law, and for the past four years has lent his support to the Campaign for the Establishment of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (CUNPA), a prominent organization consecrated to setting up a genuine world parliament within the UN. Since 2003, moreover, Boutros-Ghali has been the director of the Egyptian National Council of Human Rights.

And Boutros-Ghali isn't shy about his interest in the current goings-on. After expressing concern to the Indo-Asian News Service on February 5 that the Egyptian unrest might trigger an economic collapse there, Boutros-Ghali volunteered his services as a mediator to ease conflicts among the various interest groups jostling for power in the new Egypt. Indeed, with his pedigree as an Egyptian and UN diplomat



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and his connections with the People Who Matter abroad, it would be astonishing if Boutros-Ghali did not have a significant role in Egypt's rebuilding.

Freedom

For those watching the course of the Egyptian protests, the revolt against Mubarak actually had two very distinct, even opposing, parts. What began as an artless expression of popular desire for freedom from police-state rule eventually morphed into something quite different, at least beyond the symbolic confines of aptly named Tahrir ("Liberation") Square in downtown Cairo. The revolt spread in its final days to the remotest reaches of Egypt, but beyond the idealistic crowds of Cairo and Alexandria with their pleas for liberty, Egypt was wracked by throngs of unionized workers demanding better salaries and more lavish benefits. Such, of course, are the cadences not of liberty but of socialism, which Mubarak's National Democratic Party, a member of the Socialist International, so clumsily implemented. For despite (or perhaps because of) \$1.5 billion in annual foreign aid from the United States, the average Egyptian lived on about \$2 a day, and vast areas of the narrow inhabitable strip of land along the Nile were given over to slums. Certainly clamors for better wages and benefits are understandable under such circumstances, but, inasmuch as such demands can only be met by expanding the public sector at the expense of the private, they will lead only to more poverty, more wealth redistribution, and less capital formation.

It is important to bear in mind that Egypt has been for decades one of the largest recipients of U.S. foreign aid (along with Israel). Most of her military hardware — the machinery of state control that ended up forcing the issue after Mubarak's refusal to resign — is paid for by U.S. taxpayers. Egypt has been, since the Camp David accord under President Jimmy Carter, a virtual U.S. protectorate, and her government a wholly owned subsidiary of Washington, D.C. Tens of billions of dollars have been lavished on Egypt's politicians and military, a relationship that is unlikely to end anytime soon. It is inconceivable that the Egyptian military, now brokering the formation of a new government, would allow the creation of any state that would spurn the American gravy train. Demonstrators, suspicious that the military does not intend to allow meaningful reforms, have turned out in force again to signal their impatience — only to be fired on by the authorities. The military was quick to apologize for the "mistake," but the message was unmistakable: The men with the American-made tanks and guns are in charge, and will not be pushed into biting the hand that feeds them.

Thus, the outcome in Egypt is likely to resemble that in Eastern Europe subsequent to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union a generation ago: Egyptians (as well as Tunisians and, eventually, the rest of the Arab world) will be successful, like the Czechs, Poles, East Germans, and Russians before them, in casting off the current trappings of repression, and will doubtless end up freer than they have been. However, as has proven the case in the former Eastern Bloc, many of the same people will remain in charge, and the essentials of socialist government will remain in place. As a result, the Middle East — like the former Soviet-bloc countries vis-à-vis Western Europe — will be better off than it was, but remain impoverished relative to the rest of the world. Such, at least, will be the outcome if the Eastern European past is the Egyptian and Middle Eastern prelude.



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