



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 4, 2011

Egyptians Stage “Day of Departure”

After days of violent clashes between pro- and anti-Mubarak forces in Egypt, today is relatively serene as Egypt’s defense minister met with some of the anti-government protesters, who are preparing for what they’ve dubbed the “Day of Departure,” a final push for the toppling of President Hosni Mubarak’s government.



Thousands of protesters at today’s rally continued their demands that Mubarak step down, chanting “Leave!” and bearing signs reading “Now!”

Nearly 10,000 protesters arrived in Cairo to stage the [demonstration](#), while hundreds were lined up along the Nile Bridge waiting to enter Tahrir Square. The demonstrators — many of whom were attired in hard hats and helmets in preparation for violent outbursts — planned to march to the Presidential Palace.

Though President Mubarak [announced](#) on Tuesday that he would not be seeking re-election, protesters have indicated that they are unwilling to wait until the end of his term in September. Following Mubarak’s announcement, protesters were captured on video shouting, “No! No! No!” *News One* reported of the protesters:

Television cameras showed the vast crowds gathered in central Tahrir Square in Cairo roaring, but not necessarily in approval. The protesters have made the president’s immediate and unconditional resignation a bedrock of their movement, and it did not appear that the concession would mollify them.

Nevertheless, Mubarak continues to assert that he will serve the remaining seven months of his term, though the Obama administration is currently engaged in talks with Egyptian officials encouraging the president’s immediate resignation and the establishment of an interim government that will rule until free elections fairly select a new president. U.S. officials are floating the possibility of a either a military-backed caretaker government or a transitional government run by Vice President Omar Suleiman.

Protest leader Mohamed ElBaradei has urged Mubarak to “hear the clear voice coming from the people and leave in dignity,” adding, “The quicker he leaves in dignity the better it is for everybody.”

During today’s meeting between the Egyptian Defense Minister Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and protesters, soldiers checked the IDs of those entering the demonstration. Fox News reports:

Soldiers checked IDs to ensure those entering were not police in civilian clothes or ruling party members and performed body searches at the square’s entrances, a sign that Egypt’s most



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powerful institution was sanctioning the demonstration-though Tantawi tried to convince those he spoke to end it.

Thus far, today's atmosphere has been relatively peaceful following the outbreak of violence between pro- and anti-Mubarak crowds on Thursday. Approximately 5,000 protesters engaged in prayer at noon, followed by chants of "Leave! Leave! Leave!"

Likewise, several Egyptian celebrities arrived at the "Day of Departure," including Sherihan, a famous beauty from the 1980s and '90s, who commented, "This is really a popular revolution. It's civilized and honorable."

Other protesters are also pleased by the momentary peace. Mahmoud Salem, a youth activist at the demonstration whose car was attacked during Thursday's turmoil, asserted, "We're calling on this to be the largest protest ever. We are hoping it will be the last one."

Likewise, former presidential candidate Ayman Nour indicates that he is hopeful the demonstration will "lead to Mubarak's departure."

Until Mubarak's departure, protesters have refused to negotiate with the government on the country's transition.

Vice President Suleiman invited a number of protest leaders to convene for talks, including the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood. Of the controversial group, Fox News reports:

The Brotherhood has rushed to take a stronger role in the unprecedented protests that erupted 10 days ago, led by more secular young activists demanding the ouster of Mubarak. The Brotherhood's strength was on display in the pitched battles on Wednesday and Thursday against government supporters who attacked the protester's [sic] camp in Cairo's central Tahrir Square before they were driven from the square by the pro-democracy forces.

It is perhaps instructions from the Brotherhood that is the cause of today's apparent détente.

According to Amr Said, a 41-year old supporter of the Brotherhood, "Our instructions are not to assume a role that is too visible at the moment, and to get along with all other groups including leftists and liberals." He added, "We also refrain from making our typically brotherhood chants and when one of us does, we quickly shut him up."

It is the potential for the radical Muslim Brotherhood to gain greater power as a result of these protests that has provoked the United States to maintain a role in the negotiation process with President Mubarak.

Photo: In this image from Egyptian state television aired on Feb. 1, 2011, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak delivers an address announcing he will not run for a new term in office in September elections, but rejected demands that he step down immediately and leave the country, vowing to die on Egypt's soil: AP Images



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