

Review

State versus society in Egypt: Consolidating democracy or upgrading autocracy

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It is to be noted that the ideological and theoretical debate concerning issues of social evolution and development in Egypt was generally state centered, and relied heavily on theoretical concepts such as bureaucratic authoritarianism, Oriental despotism and the Asiatic mode of production. For some considerable time the state seemed formidable enough to have subdued society through its authoritarian mechanisms such as the military, the security institution and the centralized economy. This study seeks to achieve two main objectives: First, to discuss and explain the dynamics of Egyptian mode of authoritarianism during the presidencies of Gamal Abdul Nasser (1952-1970), Anwar Sadat (1970-1981) and Hosni Mubarak (1981-present). Secondly, to look at the future prospects for establishing a democratic state in Egypt based on constitution and constitutionalism.

Key words: Pharaonicism, democratization, liberalization, civil society, Naser, Sadat, Mubarak, authoritarianism.

INTRODUCTION

It is to be noted that the ideological and theoretical debate concerning issues of social evolution and development in Egypt was generally state centered, and relied heavily on theoretical concepts such as bureaucratic authoritarianism, Oriental despotism and the Asiatic mode of production¹. For some considerable time the state seemed formidable enough to have subdued society through its authoritarian mechanisms such as the military, the security institution and the centralized economy.²

There is no doubt that most of the structural changes that took place in Egypt since the 23rd July, 1952 army-led coup were operated from the top of the political

pyramid and not as an expression of a mass movement. The same holds true for the restricted political diversity in the Sadat period, or the controlled liberal policies in the Mubarak regime. The controlled mode of change from above, conforms with the Pharaonic political system described by Gamal Himdan (Himdan, 1987; Ayubi, 1989). The ruler or head of state in Egypt always enjoyed unlimited authority that borders on deification, and the legal and constitutional framework of the Egyptian state endorses this situation from 1971.

No wonder then that political Pharaonism should endorse the authority of the oppressive state over the weak and acquiescent society³. This makes it necessary to achieve a "second liberation" to accomplish the aims of the "first liberation" from colonialism. We note that the limited reforms introduced to the mode of bureaucratic authoritarianism in Egypt were carried out by the governing elite, under strict control. Thus the concept of

¹ For several excellent discussions of this phenomenon see: Fahmy, Ninette S. *The Politics of Egypt: State-Society Relationship*. London: Routledge, 2002. and Hassan, Hamdy Abdel Rahman. (Ed.), *Democratic Transformation in Egypt*, in *Democratic Transformation in the Arab World during the Nineties*, Al-Mafraq, Al Albeith University, 2000, pp 3-6. (in Arabic).

² Since the 1950s, the nature of personal authoritarian rule in Egypt has remained virtually unchanged. See: Kassem, Maye. *Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004.

³ Hamdan, Jamaal. *Gamal Hamdan: Collected Works*. Cairo: Ministry of Culture, Egypt, Foreign Cultural Relations, 2000.

power alternation is not consensual, and in Egypt it looks very ambiguous, especially after the introduction of the constitutional amendment in 1980, which practically perpetuated the period of the presidency to lifetime. The president could run for an unlimited number of terms, rather than one term as was initially stipulated in the 1971 constitution.

This paper will focus on the dynamics of Egyptian mode of authoritarianism during the presidencies of Gamal Abdul Nasser (1952-1970), Anwar Sadat (1970-1981) and Hosni Mubarak (1981-present). In the first part of this paper, there will be a discussion of the transition from liberalism under the monarchy to authoritarianism under the Nasser regime. Both the second and third parts examine Egypt's brand of liberalization and the tensions between the traditional mode of authoritarian governance and the push for democratization during the tenures of Presidents Sadat and Mubarak. The fourth part seeks to shed light on the main factors that have, and continue to serve as obstacles to democratization in Egypt. The fifth part of this paper offers some suggestions for transcending authoritarianism and for establishing a democratic state in Egypt based on constitution and constitutionalism.

As a result, the study seeks to achieve two main objectives: First, analyse the process of democratization in Egypt which began with tactical political openings on whose goal was to sustain rather than transform autocracy. Both Sadat and Mubarak regimes were able to follow a survival strategy by putting into place policies that could be considered liberal. Secondly, present a holistic perspective about the future of the political system in Egypt.

FROM LIBERALISM TO NASSERISM

Egypt since its independence on February 1922 has struggled for real democracy. The constitution of 1923 established a democratic parliamentary system similar to that of many contemporary European nations. (Youssef, 1983; Hilal, 1979) It stated that the people were the source of all powers. It also included a number of important democratic principles such as separation of powers, ministerial responsibility, and freedom of the press as well as a wide range of civil and individual liberties.

But this democratic experience ended with the advent of the military on July, 1952. Unfortunately, the period 1923-1952 was characterized by constant political instability. The Wafd Party, which was the unchallenged majority party during this period, was not able to remain in power for more than eight years. Thus, minority parties ruled over the rest of the period (Murray, 1973). All in all, we may argue that the liberal experience failed to solve the socio-economic problems of the country in addition to

its failure in obtaining complete independence from Britain.

After the collapse of the monarchy in 1952, the free officers decided not to share power and instead established an authoritarian regime. On January 16, 1953, they promulgated a law banning all political parties. During the period 1962-1976, the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) was the sole, legitimate political party.⁴ The regime monopolized all political activities and suppressed all forms of opposition, secular and religious. Some scholars argued that the crucial factors of the legitimacy and survival of the regime came from Nasser's charismatic appeal. However, Nasserism failed to institutionalize itself as an ideology that could ensure its long-term durability and mobilize the social forces that had benefited from its founder's policies.

It was clear that Nasser's regime, by the late 1960s, faced a number of crises, chief among which was a participation crisis. This crisis manifested itself in three forms:

1. The suppression of political dissent on both the right and the left. Nasser has established a one-party system as a means of reforming political life.
2. The accumulation of power in the hands of one set of elites, the military, and more particularly in the hands of one man, Nasser.
3. The de-politicisation of political relations: The ruling elites had a non-political view of politics. Political action was seen as an instrument for social and economic development (Hilal, 1977).

The military defeat suffered by Egypt during the Arab-Israeli War of June 1967 forced the regime to re-examine its strategy. In 1968, Nasser reshuffled the ASU and promised to liberalize all political structures and institutions, as evident in the declaration of March 30, 1968. Nasser extremely curtailed all civil liberties during his rule; many scholars agreed that Nasser's regime (1952-70) was the most significant since Muhammad Ali, with regards to the modernization and secularization of Egypt. Nasser had his own "modernized" formula for legitimacy, which enhanced secularism in the country (Hopwood, 1982).

It was very obvious that Nasser sustained a very personalized type of rule. The recruitment of elite members in Egypt during his rule was embedded within a network of unofficial loyalties, which turned the political system into an entity that was based on personal considerations rather than institutionalized norms. The recruitment process guaranteed a certain degree of political and ideological homogeneity within the ranks of

⁴ Nasser established two mass political organizations prior to the ASU. The first was called the Liberation Rally in 1954. It was followed by the National Union in 1956. In fact they acted as a mobilization instrument for the ruling military junta.

the elites. The objective criteria for inclusion within the ranks of the elite receded, thereby pushing personal loyalties to the fore. This had inevitable repercussions on the technical and professional efficiency of the state apparatus. Against this backdrop, institutional regulations and regulated political competitiveness diminished considerably. The political elites headed by the ruler himself and owing him personal allegiance was not subjugated to any kind of official supervision (al Gamal, 1993).

EGYPT UNDER SADAT: TRANSITION FROM ABOVE

Following Nasser's death in 1970, his successor, President Anwar Sadat tried to legitimize his rule using three slogans: The rule by law; government by institutions; and; political freedom. Sadat himself spearheaded the critique of the ruling ASU by issuing the October 1974 Manifesto which basically outlined the Sadat regime's plans to liberalize the Egyptian polity, as a major departure from the Nasser regime⁵. So, with the official adoption of a policy of economic and political liberalization, Egypt witnessed the dawning of a new political climate. The issue of democracy became a public concern, which the system could not afford to ignore any longer.¹

The shift towards political liberalization

The first signs of an evolution towards a competitive democracy in Egypt appeared in January 1976, when Sadat appointed a committee for the "Future of Political Action." The Committee's main task was to study the issue of establishing forums, their role in consolidating democracy and their effect on the future of political action in Egypt. After holding 16 meetings by the committee between February 2, and March 9, 1976, four basic trends emerged from the discussion:

1. The majority of the members of the committee opposed multi-party system and instead advocated for the establishment of fixed forums within the ruling Arab Socialist Union.
2. A smaller group also supported the continuity of the

⁵ The October paper was an ideological document presented by Sadat on April 18, 1974, and intended as a guideline for national action until the year 2000. It stated: "I reject the idea of an artificial division of the people by establishing political parties, and I also reject the idea of a one-party system which impose its tutelage upon the people... Hence I am in favor of maintaining the Arab Socialist Union as a sound framework for national unity, in which all groups can express their legitimate interests and views. The Arab Socialist Union must become a melting pot for differing points of views". See: *The October Working Paper*. Presented by President Mohamed Anwar el-Sadat, April. 1974. Cairo: The Egyptian Ministry of Information, the State Information Service, 1974.

⁵ These riots and demonstrations left an estimated 79 killed, 1,000

ASU, but favoured the establishment of changing opinion forums to increase the party's effectiveness.

3. Some members of the committee supported the establishment of a multiparty system as the best formula to achieve real democracy.

4. A residual minority view favoured the establishment of forums inside and outside of the ASU.

In March 1976 Sadat decided to allow the establishment of three political forums within the framework of the ASU, to represent the right, centre and left. Three political forums were consequently established: The Liberal Socialist Forum (the right), Egypt's Arab Socialist Forum (the centre) and the Nationalist Progressive Unionist Forum (the left). All of the three forums participated in the November 1976 parliamentary election. It was the first competitive election, since the military came to power in 1952. Competing political programs and views were proffered to the Egyptian voters. Many political groups, including individuals from the Old Wafd and Muslim Brothers, participated in the election campaign as well (Hilal, 1986).

Another step that followed the "formative" stage was when Sadat unilaterally decided on transforming the political forums into full political parties. In 1978, other three parties were established: The New Wafd Party (NWP), the National Democratic Party (NDP) which was established by Sadat to replace Egypt's ruling ASU, and the Socialist Labour Party (SLP). Thus, the democratization debate that followed the October 1973 war with Israel revealed one important aspect about the transition toward multipartyism in Egypt: The liberalization decision came from the regime's top - from Sadat himself.

This orientation, mitigated in favour of some more democratic measures. Related to this was the fact that Sadat was confident enough to have all these developments under his control. Moreover, the public environment in Egypt, especially at the level of the intellectuals, was advocating and urging for political liberalization.

The return to authoritarianism

It is interesting to note that the democratization process under Sadat suffered many obstacles and faced crucial challenges. For example, in 1977, the food riots and demonstrations against Sadat's economic policies engulfed the entire country.⁶ Sadat responded to this threat by a series of decrees, which repressively curtailed political freedoms, and civil liberties, which had grown slowly, but steadily during his previous years in power.

Following the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, which was signed in March 1979, the relationship between Sadat

wounded, and some 1,250 jailed.

and the opposition continued to deteriorate. The end result was the adoption of new measures by Sadat designed to further curtail the right to form political parties. Also, the Sadat regime banned "communists", "religious extremists," and those who held public office prior to the 1952 revolution from holding public office or participating in public activities. On June 7, 1979, Sadat engineered new elections in order to guarantee an overwhelming majority for his own party. He rigged the elections by utilizing every conceivable administrative and material pressure to achieve this goal (Hilal, 1986). In order to keep a facade of democratic rule, he arranged for 29 seats to be won by the SLP. The confrontation between the Sadat regime and the opposition reached its peak, when the President arrested all opposition leaders and journalists from the right to the left in the notorious September 1981 crackdown. Obviously, the crackdown dealt the process of democratization in Egypt a serious setback.

In summary, we can notice that the personalized character of governance persisted throughout the rule of Sadat, who managed to prevent the emergence of any organized opposition within the ranks of the political elites, notwithstanding the disagreement voiced by some of its members. Sadat succeeded in purging the ranks of the political elites by ostracizing the pro-Nasserist ideological faction. The elites, quite aware of their inability to intervene in the decision-making process and to voice any kind of opposition, turned into silent and docile individuals. The president's powers were cemented by the 1971 Constitution, which augmented presidential hegemony over every other institution. The President thus stood on top of executive authority. For example, he presided over the Ministerial Council, whose head, the prime minister, was appointed by the President. The President made the ultimate decision regarding the appointment of the cabinet ministers. Also, the President was entitled to assume the presidency of the ministerial council, to summon extraordinary cabinet meetings and to preside over its sessions in the presence of the prime minister.

More importantly, the President's authority was interlinked with legislative authority. Thus, he had the right to issue decrees, which had effect on the law. As per the constitution, the president had direct authority to issue resolutions and to sign agreements after obtaining the approval of a two-third majority of the legislative council. Thus, enormous powers were vested in the presidency. Frequent cabinet reshuffles during the Sadat era were a reflection of his attempt to reinforce and augment his hegemony, which stands as proof to the marginal role played by the political elites in the decision-making process during his era (al Gamal, 1993).

Despite Egypt's move towards political liberalization since the mid 1970s, the presidency has remained the most dominant institution. The president had enormous constitutional and legal powers in a society that has a

long tradition of a paternalistic political culture (Himdan, 1987). It was clear that almost all of the influential bodies of the state machinery were affiliated with, and subordinated to the presidency, either formally or informally. In order to implement any project in Egypt, it had to be endorsed by the presidency. As Ayyubi notes: "any important policy or project must normally have the blessing of the president before it can proceed with a reasonable prospect of success" (Ayubi, 1989).

One can describe the Sadat years in power as tumultuous punctuated by the war with Israel in 1973, prolonged military tension with Israel 1970-1973, 1974-1978, economic upheavals, including bread riots in 1977, and the isolation from Egypt's Arab allies 1978-1980. President Sadat responded to these challenges by frequently employing coercion. For example, the Sadat regime arrested opponents and brought tanks into the streets when the regime's power was threatened (Beattie, 2001).

Sadat succeeded in transforming the presidential establishment into a sort of presidential monarchy. He formed a kind of royal family of influential relatives in his entourage. He also resurrected the traditional legitimacy by insisting on his role as the lord of the Egyptian family. But how did Sadat ensure his longevity and survival in power? He was actually able to consolidate his power through the building of a strong client network of politicians allowed to enrich themselves by often illicit manipulation of the economic opening his policies afforded.

MUBARAK'S RULE: THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY AND STABILITY

The maiden steps towards political liberalization

Upon ascending to the presidency after Sadat's assassination in 1981, Mubarak took some steps designed to turn the wheels of governance from authoritarianism to democratization. One major measure was his decision to release political prisoners. Another measure was the call for national reconciliation, especially among Egypt's polarized political factions. Significantly, Mubarak re-inaugurated the process of political liberalization. In doing so, he won a considerable goodwill from all Egyptians.

However, Mubarak first test was his handling of the 1984 parliamentary elections (Hilal, 1986). The elections were conducted for the first time in Egyptian history according to the proportional representation electoral system. Five political parties contested the elections: The NDP, Liberal Party (LP), NWP, SLP and the Nationalist Progressive Unionist Party (NPUP). Interestingly, Mubarak inexplicably allowed his government to mobilize the country's huge bureaucracy, in order to produce a crushing victory for the ruling NDP. According to the results, Mubarak's ruling NDP won 87% of the vote and

all but 58 of the 448 elected seats. Clearly, the regime's tactics plus the electoral law that favored the ruling party restricted the representation of certain parties, by allowing only the NWP to get a foothold in the People's Assembly.

The second parliamentary elections during Mubarak's presidency were held on April 1, 1987, following the constitutional court's ruling that the election law was unconstitutional. For many scholars, the 1987 election was an important step in the democratization of Egypt. According to the final results, the opposition share of the elected seats in the parliament rose from 13% in the 1984 elections, to 22.32%, while the number of seats held by the ruling party decreased from 87 to 77.78%.

The 1987 election witnessed a de facto recognition of the political opposition forces, such as the Muslim Brothers and the Egyptian Marxists, which had been denied participation in the political process. Under the umbrella of the SLP coalition, the Muslim Brothers participated in the election and won seats in the assembly.

In his inaugural address, following the taking of the oath of office for a second term as the President of Egypt in October 1987, Mubarak said that, "Democracy is a firm fact on which no one can cast doubt. Democracy is not only essential in itself but also predicts stability and ensures prosperity. It is a requisite for the growth of the economy and the welfare of the people. The regime is for every one and the opposition is an indivisible part of it because Egypt is the homeland of all Egyptians." (Hilal, 1986). However, the opposition parties continued to complain about the election law, the rigging of the parliamentary elections and governmental pressures throughout the 1987 election. The opposition raised these issues in the courts. Apparently in response to the grievances of the opposition, President Mubarak dissolved the People's Assembly and called for new elections on November 1990. However, the major political parties and groups boycotted the elections. (Abdel-Majid and Mossad, 1992).

The outcome of the 1995 legislative elections gave the ruling NDP the largest number of seats ever in the People's Assembly.⁷ A cardinal feature of this period was that the Egyptian government tightened its control over society in a variety of ways, thus reducing the people's ability to influence politics.

A major development occurred in July 2000, when Egypt's Supreme Constitutional court declared that the country's parliament was illegitimate. So both the 1990 and 1995 elections were considered unlawful. This action by the constitutional court confirmed the opposition's claim that the ruling NDP used illegal means to win the various elections, including rigging. Also, Egypt's judiciary made it difficult for the ruling NDP to rig elections in the

future by ruling that there was no reason for requiring that elections be completed in a single day. Also, the supreme constitutional court overturned a controversial 1999 law that restricted the participation of non-governmental organizations as election monitors.

The year 2000 witnessed the first parliamentary elections in the Egyptian's history to be held under full judicial supervision. However, The NDP, as usual, easily secured the overwhelming majority in the People's Assembly— 388 of the 454 seats (87.8%). The NWP won only seven seats. The NPUP won six seats, and the Nasserites won three seats, in addition to five of the independents who were allied with it. The LP, on the other hand, won only one seat. Independents won 37 seats. Among these independents there were 17 members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Again in 2005 parliamentary election, The NDP won its expected victory, obtaining a total of 311 seats. "The Muslim Brotherhood obtained a total of 88 parliamentary seats, by far the strongest showing by an Egyptian opposition party in half a century. And even more striking was the rate of success. Sixty-one percent of the 144 candidates it nominated won" (Al Shobky, 2005, Oweidat, 2008).

Clearly, political pluralism flourished to some extent during the early years of Hosni Mubarak's presidency. However, the persistence of the "one dominant party system" has failed to improve the regime's performance and efficiency in solving Egypt's development problems. It is apparent that the ruling NDP rules for the sake of ruling. Thus, there is no chance of a real rotation of power in Egypt. Many opposition leaders requested President Mubarak on several occasions to keep himself aloof from the NDP and become the President of all Egyptians⁸.

The return to authoritarianism

The role of the security establishment

The military institution is one of the basic components of the Egyptian state structure⁹. In spite of its relative decline as a major source of power for the ruling elites during the Mubarak era, this is by no means an indication of the waning of its influence on the political system, given the fact that the President himself is a member of the armed forces. The decreasing representation of the

⁸ On August 29, 1995, the leaders of the opposition parties and representatives of other political forces issued their demands for political reforms in Egypt . Ibrahim Shukry et al , Letter To the President, Cairo, 1995.

⁹ Egypt maintains a large and professional army which numbers 450,000 personnel . The active Military Reserve: 254,000 and active Paramilitary Units: 405,000 .See Egypt Military Strength at: http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=Egypt Accessed on 29 th of October, 2010.

⁷ . The NDP held 417 seats, The NWP 6 seats , NPUP 5 seats, Muslim Brotherhood 1 seat, The Liberal Party 1 seat, Np 1 seat and true independents 13 seats. See, Arab Strategic Year Book, 1995, (Cairo Al-Ahram Center For Political and Strategic Studies, 1996), p.386.

army among the ranks of the ruling elites has been accompanied by its increased influence in other civilian domains (Cook, 2007). The military institution is undeniably a cornerstone of the system. It is expected to intervene in times of severe crises, which represent serious challenges to the ruling regime, as was the case in 1986, when the army intervened to crush the rebellion of the Central Security Forces. The army has also displayed its willingness to stand up to any potential threat posed by militant Islamic groups.

In general, it is the police and security forces' intimate association with the presidency that ensures the continuity of Egypt's political system (Cook, 2007: 73). However, in case of their failure to accomplish this mission, the armed forces stand out as the last defense line. It should be noted, however, that the security forces perform their task in protecting the regime under the rule of the martial law. This role is not restricted to quelling militant groups, but extends to include the suppression of any peaceful protests organized by various political and social actors.

In view of the special role played by the military in the Egyptian political system since the first spark of the revolution was lighted, one of the major challenges facing the democratization efforts in Egypt presently and in the future is the critical development of the relationship between the civilian sector and the army, as well as the role each of them plays in reinforcing the legitimacy of the regime and in preserving social and political stability.

Since the 1970s, the Egyptian military has had an expanding role in economic issues in Egypt. President Hosni Mubarak has a vision of the beneficial role the military could play as an engine for economic growth and development. This led to what Robert Springborg refers to as a "horizontal expansion in the role of the military into the national economy. The military's role in Egypt's economy is represented in four primary sectors: military industries, civilian industries, agriculture, and national infrastructure." (Springborg, 1989).

On the other hand, because of its lack of deep public support and genuine political legitimacy, the Mubarak regime depends heavily on the military. For example, the military provides President Mubarak with security, support and guards his interests in the society. As a result, many officers came to play an increasingly important role, enriching themselves and becoming more and more a vital part of the state elites (Goodson and Radwan, 1997).

Political and administrative corruption

The phenomenon of political corruption in Egypt is characterized by several traits. At the core is the fact that corruption has become an integral part of the working mechanisms in a number of state institutions, due to the

inability of the Central Auditing Organization to audit the lower echelons of the administrative structure. Another reason is the involvement of some of the higher political and administrative officials in corrupt practices.

The predominant atmosphere of political corruption has enabled some social groups to exert their influence on a number of state institutions, making direct and indirect use of these relationships to prosper from some illegal activities such as the trade in expired and inedible food products, or the evasion of custom duties, etc.. Perhaps the most important manifestation of obscenity of wealth in the years of President Mubarak's rule is the source of this wealth. The sources of personal wealth in Egypt were no longer associated with mediation (such as trading, entrepreneurship and brokerage) as was the case at the early years of the open doors policy, but rather the seizure of state funds has become the most important sources for personal enrichment in Egypt (Amin, 2009).

Moreover, corruption has become a general trend that is not restricted to central institutions, but extends to local authorities as well. It is also not limited to governmental institutions, but its tentacles have reached non governmental entities such as parties, syndicates and voluntary organizations (Amin, 2009). Furthermore, a multiplicity of factors reinforce corruption, such as the lack of mechanisms of accountability, the receding respect for the law, as well as the deteriorating economic conditions of a large number of state employees. The impotence of popular control mechanisms, as well as the trend to take this phenomenon for granted, and above all the weak levels of morality, have all contributed to the exacerbation of the problem.

Personal enrichment without cause never ever stopped during the past twenty years. Outright corruption as well as deficiencies in the regulation of public and private sector business practices provided great opportunities for enormous fortunes in a short time span. This has led to increased anger and frustration among the poor Egyptians.

In the light of the above, one could note that widespread political and administrative corruption has its negative repercussions manifested in the widening social and economic gap, the exhaustion of national resources and the erosion of the basis of legitimacy of the political regime. All of these factors contribute to the creation of an environment that is favorable to the growth of political and social opposition forces, which reject the status quo and seek radical change.

The state and the international system

The nature of the relationship which connects the Egyptian state to the international system is one of the major determinants of the role the state plays in the development process. A number of elements are of great

importance: The implementation by the Egyptian state of an economic reform program, since the early 1990s, as per the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, has made Egypt's relationship with the IMF a major factor in deciding the role played by the state in the economic and social development process. The IMF policies have called, among other things, for the withdrawal of the state from the economic and social spheres, through the adoption of a number of measures such as the reduction or the removal of subsidies, the privatization of the public sector, etc. The implementation of those policies could represent a source of social tension and political instability, especially in view of the persistence of political and financial corruption, as well as the increased economic and social gap (Korayem, 1997; Licari, 1997).

Egyptian-American relations represent another important element of the external environment that is affecting economic and political developments in Egypt. The fact that Egyptian policies and practices are not always congruent with the American agenda, one could say that the two countries are adamant in cherishing a special relationship. The American administration combines the use of the carrot and the stick in its relations with Egypt (Ibrahim, 2000). The significance of the Egyptian-American relations is attributed to the role played by the United States in the area, and to the regional importance of Egypt. The complexity of these relationships is emphasized by the American attempt to define Egypt's regional role within the framework of its own agenda or at least to neutralize the Egyptian role. The Egyptian government, on the other hand, attempts to preserve a minimum amount of freedom to allow the adoption of some positions that are not necessarily compatible with the American agenda.

Critically, the economic reform program opens the door to the ownership the multinational corporations of local assets, which could have negative repercussions, in view of the inefficiency of state institutions in managing the privatization process. Also, state institutions have failed to guarantee the needed transparency throughout the whole process, which makes the state accountable for the negative effects of the economic reforms.

Another element is the sensitivity of the Egyptian economy to regional and global instabilities, especially the sectors which depend mainly on revenues, such as the remittances sent by Egyptians working abroad, as well as the revenues generated by the oil sector, the Suez Canal and the tourism sector.

The process of globalization imposes on Egypt and the South in general score of challenges. The information technology on the one hand, limits the capacity of the regime to keep a lid on its domestic practices. The diffusion of the values of democracy, on the other hand, generates internal and external pressures for the democratization of the system. The interaction with the

forces of globalization renders the task of developing the policies, institutions and systems of such nations, an absolute necessity, to be able to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness.

The state and political parties and civil society organizations

Most of the political parties have acquired their license to practice politics through law-suits, after their applications had been denied by the Political Party Affairs Committee. This represents a clear indication of the role played by this Committee in hampering the formation of new parties. However, the judiciary has continued to play a pivotal role in the arduous struggle to establish a functional multiparty system in Egypt (Abdel Rahman, 2002). The challenge of establishing a functional multiparty system is reflected in the fact that the current number of existing political parties, which amounts to 24, is not an indication of a real multi-party system, due to the extreme imbalance between the ruling NDP, on the one hand, and the other political parties, on the other. Reference should also be made to the limitations imposed on the other political parties, as well as to the unhealthy relationship between the NDP and the opposition. The financial support obtained by some of these parties from the state represents a major source of money, which allows them to survive. But, the financial dependence on the state adversely affects these political parties' independence.

The relationship, which connects the state to the interest groups, is an indicator of the degree of democratization. The greater the independence of the interest groups from the state, the higher the level of democratization and vice versa. A number of interest groups exist in Egypt such as the labor unions, the professional syndicates, the business associations and the student movement, to name but a few.

The relationship between the state and the trade unions is predicated on the total dependence of the unions on the state. The relationship between the state and the professional syndicates, on the other hand, has faced some real challenges during the Mubarak era, as reflected in the emerging role of the Muslim Brotherhood in a number of important syndicates, since the mid 1980s.

However, the Syndicate Democratization Law will in effect put an end to the role played by the Brotherhood in those syndicates, which would inevitably mean the curtailment of their independence from the state. As to the nature of the relations between the state and the businessmen associations, these are determined by the nature of those associations, in terms of the social origins of the membership, as well as their stance towards the policies and strategies adopted by the state.

The state and the non governmental organizations

By the end of 2008, there were some 30,000 civil society organizations in Egypt, or approximately one for every 2,800 Egyptian residents. Only a minority of those, however, is active. Religious and development associations together represent more than half of all associations (Abdalla, 2008). Other important groups include sports, youth and social clubs and cooperatives. There are 115 trade and industry chambers, 24 professional syndicates and 22 workers' unions organized under a common federation. Moreover, there are currently 24 legally registered political parties. Mere numbers, however, do not represent the true strength of civil society, especially as some organizations may be ineffective and exist on paper only, and because memberships may span multiple organizations. It is therefore necessary to study in greater detail the different characteristics of the various types of civil society organizations as well as their relationships with the state.

The state's policies towards NGOs have not undergone any fundamental changes since the 1970s. Accordingly, the state has carried on with its control policies towards NGOs within the framework of a set of restrictive laws, which closely monitor the establishment of those organizations. Also, the laws allow the state, represented by the Ministry of Social Solidarity, to censure the activities of NGOs, dissolve them, and confiscate their funds or to merge two organizations into one. This approach enables the government to control political life indirectly to give a façade of democracy when the truth is quite the opposite, with everything under control through a blend of authoritarian laws.

The state and the political islamic movements

The Mubarak regime has distinguished between the Muslim Brotherhood, as a moderate group, which abhors violence, and other extremist militant groups in opposition to the ruling regime. Thus, the regime adopted a conciliatory approach towards the Muslim Brotherhood, while dealing with the militant fanatic groups with an iron fist policy (Al Sayyid and Mustapha 2002). Since the mid 1990s, however, the ruling regime has deviated from its earlier approach towards the Brotherhood, under the pretext that Brotherhood is maintaining relations with the militant groups.

Thus, the regime embarked on the dissolution of the Brotherhood's influence in all professional syndicates, and outlawed its participation in the parliamentary elections of 1995. Moreover, confrontation between the state security forces and the Brotherhood escalated. Clearly, the nature of the relationship between the Muslim Brethren and the Mubarak regime remains one of the major determinants of the future of political and

democratic developments in Egypt.

The 2005 national referendum and elections: Missed opportunities

In early 2005, the Mubarak regime had another opportunity to reverse the tide of authoritarianism and set Egypt on the path to democratization. The Mubarak regime could have used the national referendum held in May 2005 to reform Egypt's entire political system by stripping it of its pharaonic core. But, disappointingly, the referendum focused on article 76 of the constitution to allow multiple candidates to contest the presidency. However, there are two major restrictions. The central one is that the National Electoral Commission has the authority to review the list of presidential aspirants and to disqualify those it wants to. The other restriction is that as of 2011, parties fielding candidates for the presidency must have secured a minimum of 5% of the seats in parliament during the 2005 election and must have been in existence for a minimum of 5 years. But these provisions are antithetical to democracy. This is because the National Electoral Commission should not be given such discretionary powers that would certainly be used to disqualify candidates, who posed formidable challenge to Mubarak. Another reason is that the five year threshold of existence would make it difficult for new political parties that are driven by national exigencies to emerge and contest the presidency.

With the opportunity for genuine political reforms squandered by the Mubarak regime, Egyptians went to the polls in September 2005, to elect a new president based on the "multiple candidates provision" passed by the national referendum, and a new parliament. As expected, the incumbent, Hosni Mubarak, President and Flag Bearer of the ruling NDP, "won" a "landslide victory" with 88.6% of the votes for a fifth consecutive six-year term. Ayman Nour (The Tomorrow Party) and Noaman Gomaa (NWP) garnered 7.6 and 2.9% respectively. Voters turn-out was a low 23.9%. The presidential race was criticized for a variety of reasons. A major criticism was that the National Electoral Commission, serving as a handmaid of President Mubarak and the ruling NDP, disqualified 20 presidential aspirants, including those who could have made the race competitive.

For example, Taalat Sadat, a nephew of the late President Anwar Sadat, was not allowed to contest. Also, the Muslim Brotherhood was banned. Additionally, independent candidates were restricted. Similarly, some of the major opposition parties, including the leftist Tagammu Party and the Nasserist Party, boycotted the election arguing that since the entire electoral process was fraught with fraud perpetrated to give President Mubarak an advantage, the outcome of the voting for president was therefore a foregone conclusion. Another

problem was that international monitors were not allowed to observe the election.

THE OBSTACLES TO DEMOCRATIZATION IN EGYPT

Egypt is a “presidential state,” which is characterized by the dominance of the presidency. All authoritative and influential bodies of the state machinery are subordinated to the presidency, formally or informally. It seems that the old paternalistic and pharaonic relationship in Egypt has perpetuated the hegemony of the Egyptian Presidency. Almost every Egyptian ruler is aware of this cultural and historical element. For example, President Sadat himself affirmed his role as a pharaoh in the political system. By asserting that: “Abdel Nasser and I were the last Pharaohs. Did Abdel Nasser need any written rules to follow? I don’t need such rules either! The rules, which you are talking about, have been issued for our successors. Ordinary presidents such as Mohammed, Ali and Omar will follow us. And of course, they will need these rules” (Bahaaedeen, 1987).

No doubt, President Sadat believed that the democratization project was solely dependent upon the whims and caprices of the President of Egypt. Accordingly, during his tenure, he tried to control the totality of the political arena by establishing his own laws, such as the “Shame Law” and the “Law Protecting Social Peace.” Thus, President Sadat believed that he was the giver of democracy; hence, the process of democratization had to be designed and controlled by him. For example, once he warned his political opponents that “Democracy has sharp teeth.” In other words, the democratization process could be used to facilitate and achieve authoritarian ends.

Significantly, the legal basis for the continuation of pharaonic rule in Egypt is provided by the 1971 Constitution. The constitution gives the President enormous amount of authority comparable to that of a tyrant. Even when the constitution was amended in May 1980, the pivotal role of the President was further enhanced.

For example, according to the amended Article 77 of the Constitution, “The term of the presidency shall be six Gregorian years starting from the date of the announcement of result of the plebiscite. The President of the Republic may be re-elected for other successive terms.” President Mubarak, the incumbent, has enjoyed this amendment as he has been the President of Egypt for 29 years. President Mubarak’s tenure is the longest in Egyptian history, since the reign of Mohammed Ali, the founder of modern Egypt.

Despite the national referendum that was held in May 2005, the ruling party (NDP) maintains its hegemony over parliament. Also, the presidency retained its domination over the parliament. Presidential domination is facilitated by the fact that Hosni Mubarak is the President of both

the republic and the ruling NDP; hence, he chooses NDP candidates for the People’s Assembly. This means then that the Assembly, despite its enormous constitutional powers, is a mere rubber stamp in the hands of the President. Moreover, presidential supremacy is enhanced by the control over the policy-making apparatus. According to the constitution, the president determines the general policies. He also has a great influence over the military institution. Thus, any new public project in Egypt must obtain presidential endorsement, prior to its implementation.

In essence, presidential suzerainty in Egypt during the Mubarak era has been maintained by confluence of factors. At the base is the continued vital role played by the President of the Republic in the political processes, predicated, in addition to the constitutional and legal frameworks, on a very important base of power, namely the leadership of the ruling NDP, a fact that cemented his hegemony over both the legislative and the executive authorities (Ibrahim, 1992). Demands were repeatedly made for the tenure of office of the president to be limited to two consecutive terms. However, these demands were practically ignored. The main justification was the absence of an acceptable alternative.

Another important issue that remains in the spotlight and raises doubts more often than not is President Mubarak’s insistence on not having a Vice President, since he assumed power. His basic justification was, and remains the difficulty in locating a suitable candidate for that post. This rationale raises fears of the possibility of the eruption of an eventual power struggle in a post-Mubarak dispensation. Interestingly, President Mubarak has dismissed these fears as irrelevant, asserting that the proper mechanisms for the transfer of power had been explicitly defined by the constitution (Ziad, 2000).

RETHINKING THE STATE IN EGYPT: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE PURSUANCE OF GENUINE DEMOCRATIZATION

Clearly, the “Pharoanic Egyptian State” needs to be rethought and reconstituted. The overarching goal must be to establish a new democratic state. In order to achieve the overall goal of establishing a democratic political order in Egypt, several specific reforms must be instituted. At the core must be the teaching and dissemination of the values and principles of liberalism and human rights throughout the society in a consistent and integrated manner. This is because democracy requires a democratically minded populace. Egyptian social institutions such as the family and the educational system and the bureaucracy should be at the forefront of the inculcating of new democratic values.

Another important change must be the respect for fundamental human rights by the government and its

agencies. Among other things, Egyptians should have the right to organize political parties; freely express their views; the press should have the full freedom to practice the craft of journalism, especially the publication of stories and commentaries on the political process without fear of recrimination from the government; and there should be freedom of religion based on the respect for theological and doctrinal pluralism.

In addition, the necessary reforms must be undertaken as preconditions for bringing a sure end to the rising spiral of violence and corruption in the country. These problems are deeply rooted in the fabric of the body politic, and serve as major impediments to the democratization project.

Moreover, the President of Egypt should not simultaneously serve as the President of the ruling party because it gives the ruling party a distinct advantage over other political parties in terms of access to public resources.

Furthermore, presidential influence over the electoral process should be curtailed because the president virtually controlling the National Electoral Commission, it is impossible to have free, fair and transparent elections. Clearly, this has worked to the advantage of the ruling NDP. Concomitantly, the Ministry of the Interior should be replaced by the judiciary as the supervisor of the electoral process. Given the judiciary's demonstrated independence, this would help enhance the fairness and credibility of the electoral process.

In the socio-economic realms, reforms should be instituted that would help create employment opportunities, combat corruption, address spiralling poverty, and improve the standard of living of ordinary Egyptians.

Finally, central to the reform must be the initiation and the fostering of dialogue between and among the various ideological blocs. This is important for the development of a new political culture based on the respect for political pluralism and its attendant diversity of views and opinions.

New collective protest movements :A catalyst for democratization?

Egypt has witnessed over the past five years three types of collective protest movements.

The first is directly connected to the establishment of the Egyptian Movement for Change (Kefaya) at the end of December 2004 (Ziad, 2000). This wave of protest raised the slogan "No to extension or to inheritance or corruption" and enough of the continuing conditions in Egypt since 1981. Kefaya represented a new phenomenon to Egypt. It has been able to raise the ceiling of protest by criticizing the president, his family, his son and all the ministers.

The second wave of protest movements in Egypt took a

new economic approach as protesters raised wage-related demands and asked for improved working conditions in the light of the high prices that keep pace with the policies of privatization. These movements have no political demands, rather their main focus is to improve living conditions. Protests expressed by textile workers in Egypt's various factories in Kafr el-Dawar, and Mahalla, workers and drivers of subway trains are clear examples. The third wave was launched on April 6, 2008 by the new young heroes who exhibited a new political and social force. This new force turned to the internet as a new protest group. As a political facebook group with the most dynamic debates, it was able to mobilize more than 70,000 members. Members main concerns include free speech, nepotism in government and the country's stagnant economy. They share their ideas for reform in Egypt (Oweidat, 2008; Shapiro, 2009).

What is significant here is that the political system in all its official institutions seemed unable to contain these young people, and the question here is: Can this new force be the impetus for political change in Egypt? Is it possible to rely on them to pressure the regime to change its politics dramatically? The future of Egypt is highly unpredictable. However, what can be deduced with a high degree of certainty is that, as long as the Mubarak regime remains determined to cling on to the martial law and the use of the security apparatus to manipulate the political process, the prospects for democratization and human rights in Egypt will remain bleak.

CONCLUSION

Historically, Egypt has been an authoritarian state. The roots of authoritarianism can be traced to the pharaonic tradition. Each modern regime - from the monarch to the current one, has maintained the authoritarian core of the pharaonic tradition. Even efforts aimed at democratizing the polity have tended to be stymied; consequently, necessitating a reversion to authoritarianism.

The related point is that Egypt has had several opportunities to exorcise the authoritarian demon; but, the political class has lacked the required political will. The May 2005 national referendum provide a glorious opportunity for the Mubarak regime to effect major political reforms that would have set the country on the course towards democratization. Unfortunately, the referendum was focused on making only a single change in the constitution to allow multiple candidates to contest the presidency. But characteristically, a change that appeared to be a promoter of democratization was undercut by the restrictions imposed. For example, the National Electoral Commission is given the authority to debarred aspirants from contesting the presidential election.

Clearly, there is a dire need to rethink and reconstitute

the Egyptian State with the overall goal of replacing authoritarianism with democracy. However, in order to achieve this goal, several reforms must be instituted, including the teaching and dissemination of democratic values in social and political institutions; the promotion of the respect of human rights; the end of presidential influence over the electoral process; and the provision of social and economic opportunities.

In summary, the future of Egypt is highly unpredictable. However, what can be deduced with a high degree of certainty is that, as long as the Mubarak regime remains determined to cling on to the martial law and use the security apparatus to manipulate the political process, the prospects for democratization and human rights in Egypt will remain bleak.

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