

The Popular Uprising in Egypt: The Military Machine Remains Intact, The Political Status Quo Prevails

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The same group of Egyptian generals running Cairo presently also formed the backbone of the Mubarak regime. There has been no real change in government. The military junta represents a continuation of the Mubarak regime. The previous so-called civilian administration and the Egyptian High Council of the Armed Forces are virtually the same body.

The generals would have run Egypt either way, under the so-called civilian government formed by Mubarak before he resigned or the current military government. While the generals rule the Nile Valley, a “controlled opposition” *is being manufactured and nurtured by the U.S. and its allies.*

Change is forthcoming. Whose interests will it serve? Those of Washington and Brussels or those of the grassroots movements in North Africa and Southwest Asia?

The Imperial Province of Egypt

Since its inception as a Roman province, Egypt was always a valuable and important territory, its role as a breadbasket and economic hub were so significant for the Romans that it had a status as a special “imperial province” ruled directly by the Roman emperors.

Today, Egypt is of immense importance to America’s imperial ambitions. The Suez Canal is a global artery of maritime trade and of vast strategic importance as a military and energy corridor. The “Global Constabulary” that is Washington’s self-imposed role as global arbiter would be crippled without Egypt firmly in place.

Even if speaking hypothetically, when U.S. General James Mattis says that if the Suez Canal is closed, then the U.S. military will engage Egypt offensively (meaning attack or invade), he is not joking. [1] The Suez Canal is an important part of the global economy, the military network of the U.S. and NATO, and Washington’s modern-day and ever more mutinous empire.

What has changed in Post-Ben Ali Tunisia and Post-Mubarak Egypt?

Aside from the spirit and the confidence of the people, both Tunis and Cairo have not seen any substantial changes. The English playwright William Shakespeare said it best: “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” [2] In the case of post-Mubarak Egypt and post-Ben Ali Tunisia it must be said that “dictatorship and tyranny by any other name is still dictatorship and tyranny.” The point simply is as follows; what is important is what

something is and not what something is called.

The chiefs of two oppressive Arab regimes are gone, but their actual regimes still remain in one form or another. Mubarak and Ben Ali were dominant actors within the power structure of the regimes in Tunis and Cairo. Yet, there is still an oligarchic supporting structure which remains intact. Both Mubarak and Ben Ali could almost be thought of in terms of the firsts amongst a set of peers or *primus inter pares*. Both dictators were members of a cast of oligarchs within their respective authoritarian republics.

The regime structures remain. Also, the external forces that supported the Tunisian and Egyptian regime structures persist. These external forces are the United States and the European Union.

The Phasing in of the Military Junta in Cairo

Before and after Mubarak stepped down from his office, the military in Egypt started being presented as a circumvent third party actor and as the “protector” of the Egyptian people. It is not coincidental that Mohammed Al-Baradei (El-Baradei/ElBaradei) was calling for the military to takeover. [3] In pertinence to this there has been a calculated ongoing public relations campaign to support the Egyptian military.

The military junta was slowly phased in. Signs of this included the political statements that the Egyptian military had started releasing to the public before Mubarak formally resigned. [4] The journalist Hamza Hendawi, who has been actively covering Egypt, spells this out:

Egypt’s 18-day uprising produced a military coup that crept into being over many days — its seeds planted early in the crisis by Mubarak himself.

The telltale signs of a coup in the making began to surface soon after Mubarak ordered the army out on the streets to restore order after days of deadly clashes between protesters and security forces in Cairo and much of the rest of the Arab nation.

“This is in fact the military taking over power,” said political analyst Diaa Rashwan after Mubarak stepped down and left the reins of power to the armed forces. “It is direct involvement by the military in authority and to make Mubarak look like he has given up power.” [5]

Moreover, the Egyptian military is not the neutral actor that it is being portrayed as. It is a backbone of the dictatorial establishment in Egypt that hoisted Mubarak. The Egyptian military is also Washington’s best bet for holding onto Egypt and to maintain the status quo.

The Egyptian Military is a Continuation of the Mubarak Regime

Presently the Egyptian High Council of the Armed Forces runs Egypt. It is a military junta that rules by decree. Similarly in Tunis, Fouad Al-Mebazaa, one of the “old guard” of Ben Ali, is also ruling by decrees that bypass any democratic process. [6]

The rule of the military generals in Cairo is only a formality; the military has always run Egypt under the guise of civilian government. The Egyptian protests have served to solidify and consolidate the hold of the Egyptian military over the Egyptian government. It is likely that Mubarak, before he stepped down from his office, was preparing the grounds for a

military junta to take over with his new cabinet appointments. As a precaution, the new cabinet may have been part of a phasing in of open military rule.

Moreover, Mubarak's regime began as a continuation of the regime of Mohammed Anwar Al-Sadat. Mubarak and Sadat both also came from within the ranks of the Egyptian military. Sadat was an Egyptian Army officer and Mubarak was a commander in the Egyptian Air Force. The Sadat-Mubarak regime can best be described as a club of military generals. In other words, Egypt's top military brass and the regime are cast from the same lot.

Omar Suleiman, the man Mubarak selected to fill the long-time vacant post of Egyptian vice-president, too comes from the ranks of the Egyptian military. While a civilian clothed cabinet minister, General Suleiman was the head of Cairo's intelligence services. This is clear evidence of the nature of the Egyptian regime as a military government or a general's club.

Ahmed Al-Shafik, the prime minister that Mubarak appointed to his new 2011 government is also a general. Shafik was the head of the Egyptian Air Force. Nor is Shafik a new face to government; he was an Egyptian cabinet minister prior to his appointment as prime minister of Egypt.

Even Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, the deputy prime minister and defence minister of Egypt is a military general. Field Marshal Tantawi is also the supreme commander of the Egyptian military and heads the Egyptian High Council of the Armed Forces, which now officially governs Egypt. Under Mubarak's rule, Tantawi has simultaneously served as the chief of the Egyptian military and the defence minister of Egypt since 1991 until the present. If not the second most powerful individual in Egypt, Field Marshal Tantawi is one of the most powerful members of the Egyptian ruling class.

These generals – officially retired or not – form the Egyptian High Council of the Armed Forces. In other words, Suleiman, Shafik, and Tantawi are running Egypt. They would have done it under a civilian regime or a military regime. Is there a real major difference between the previous so-called civilian government and the current military junta? The differences between the two are really nominal.

In reality, a carte blanche or blank cheque has been given to the same figures that were supposedly running the civilian regime. These officials and the Egyptian state ruled under a military junta will feel less pressure for suppressing the liberty and demands of the Egyptian people. The governing status quo is very much alive.

Washington's Role in the Establishment of a Military Junta in Egypt

Like Rome in its day, the United States has established a series of global patron-client relationships as the basis of its empire. The Egyptian military is one of these U.S. clients. It is bankrolled by Washington. After Israel, Egypt is the second largest recipient of financial aid from the U.S., and the majority of this goes to the Egyptian military as a means of sustaining the patron-client relationship Washington has with Cairo.

It is because of the nature of this patron-client relationship that the U.S government had aided and abetted the takeover of Egypt by the Egyptian military. Washington presently has no other relationship in Egypt that is analogous in its strength to this. This would also not be the first time that Washington has helped prop a military government in an Arab country. In 1949, the U.S. helped secure another military takeover of the state in Syria. This has been

part of the U.S. hegemon's objective for preserving its control over its Egyptian province.

Sami Hafez Al-Anan (Al-Enan), the chief of staff of the Egyptian military, was in Washington for two days after the protests ignited in Egypt. [7] Undoubtedly, the U.S. government instructed him on what the U.S. wanted from the Egyptian regime and the military generals before his departure. After his return to Egypt, Ahmed Shafik was appointed the new prime minister and Field Marshal Tantawi became deputy prime minister. Martin Indyk, who is a former U.S. official, also openly said that the grounds should be prepared for the Egyptian military. [8] Since Indyk is no longer a U.S. official he was able to say what the White House and U.S. State Department could not openly express.

U.S. officials were also praising the Egyptian military before and after the resignation of Mubarak. The U.S. government also has not and does not intend to freeze or end its military aid to the junta in Cairo. U.S. officials are also complicit in all the acts of oppression committed under Mubarak and by the military junta.

The Egyptian Military Serves the Interests of Capital

The state and its military might are subordinated to organized capital. When Smedley D. Buttler, a retired U.S. Marine major-general, wrote in 1935 that he and the U.S. military served the interests of organized capital, he was being utterly frank. The Egyptian military, more specifically the leadership of the Egyptian military, serve the interests of capital, in both its local and global forms.

Under the Mubarak-Sadat regime the corrupt generals of Egypt have run Egypt as a vast estate. They run and control an extensive network of private enterprises and national assets, from the tourism sector and resort areas in Sharm el-Sheikh to construction companies. The lucrative Suez Canal is also under the control of the military.

No real changes can be expected under a group of generals who have an interest in maintaining the kleptocratic status quo. The Egyptian junta has also announced as the government of Egypt that it will continue the sanctions regime against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and maintain the treaty between Egypt and Israel.

Manufacturing Dissent through a Counter-Discourse

The U.S. government wants to control the situation in Egypt. In order to do this Washington is busy involved in setting up a "controlled counter-discourse" through "manufactured dissent." The controlled counter-discourse is being shaped through the manufacturing of an opposition (pseudo-opposition).

In this regard, the U.S. has declared that it is preparing to bankroll the rise of new political parties in Egypt. [9] This aid is intended to control and manipulate the internal affairs of Egypt. One should ask, what would be the reaction of the U.S. government and the American people if countries such as Russia, China, Iran, and Venezuela where funding newly forming political parties in the United States?

Washington is also desperately trying to politically hedge its bets by making gestures of support and giving nominal support to some forms of authentic opposition. Yet, all the while the U.S. government is working to dilute the authentic opposition and infiltrate the protest movements with its own so-called opposition figures. There is also a synchronized effort by the Egyptian regime - which encompasses the military junta - to do the same. The so-called

“Wise Men” group is a facet of this.

Mohammed Al-Baradei is also an opposition figure that is intended to preserve the status quo, albeit with cosmetic changes on the surface. Al-Baradei represents the imperial interests of Washington. Not only did he support the intervention of the Egyptian military, but he suggested the formation of “a transitional government headed by a presidential council of two or three figures, including a military representative.” [8] The Egyptian High Council of the Armed Forces in effect is what Al-Baradei demanded for before Mubarak’s resignation. It is also noteworthy to mention that Al-Baradei has also stated that he “respects Suleiman as someone to negotiate with over the transition [after Mubarak resigns].” [10] None of this is mere coincidence, including Al-Baradei’s calls for military intervention.

The so-called promotion of “civil society” in the form of non-government organizations (NGOs), which receive funding and training from the E.U. and Washington, are tied to creating a controlled opposition, a controlled counter-discourse, and political hedging. The declaration by the Egyptian High Council of the Armed Forces that it will govern Egypt for about six months or longer could be tied to the efforts to manufacture a “controlled opposition.” This could be one of the reasons that Martin Indyk, before Mubarak resigned, said “What we have to focus on now is getting the military into a position where they can hold the ring for a moderate and legitimate political leadership to emerge.” [11]

Since the end of the Second World War, the U.S. government has been engaged in manipulating political processes through non-state actors. This has been done through so-called democracy promotion, cultural, and educational programs. It is used as a tool of internal manipulation.

Arab Democracy

Hereto, there is no authentic Arab democracy. The consensus system in Lebanon is flawed and based on religious and confessional lines. Ironically, the only democratic system amongst the Arabs existed amid the occupied and downtrodden Palestinians.

The Palestinians had instituted a democratic system that lasted until the Hamas-Fatah split and the establishment of Mahmoud Abbas as a quasi-dictator in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Washington’s contempt for actual democracy amongst the Arabs is visible from its position on the Palestinian elections in 2006 that ushered in a Hamas government. Washington, Tel Aviv, the E.U., the House of Saud, Jordan, and Egypt were all instrumental in the debasement of democracy amongst the Palestinians.

In regards to Israel, Tel Aviv relishes calling itself a democracy in comparison to the Arabs, but claims that Israel is a democracy are also incorrect. Israel can best be characterized as an ethnocracy, which also embraces militarism and aspects of a theocracy. An ethnocratic state is a state where individual rights and state laws are based on ethnicity. Although Jews are not an ethnic group in the conventional sense, in Israel discrimination of non-Jewish Israelis is systematic and legal. Israeli Jewry and Israeli non-Jews do not have the same rights. For example, a non-Jewish Israeli citizen cannot marry someone from outside of Israel and live in Israel with them, but a Israeli Jew can. This type of discrimination is justified as legal “religious discrimination” to keep the so-called Jewish identity of Israel.

Washington’s Greater Middle East Project Will Not Materialize

If the Arab protesters are to make far-reaching changes they must persist with their demands and not back down. Nor can they ignore the role that foreign policy and economic factors play in their states. This is essential in order for genuine changes/revolutions to take place and not bogus shows of democracy. The current transitional government in Tunis and the Egyptian military junta are continuations of the old regimes. They will either try to maintain power or wait until a “controlled opposition” takes power and “managed democracies” are established in Tunisia and Egypt.

All is not doom and gloom. The U.S. government and the Egyptian junta are not omnipotent powers either. They have limited strength. Nor can they control the lower ranks of the Egyptian military. Washington and the Egyptian generals have been worried about defection amongst the ranks of the junior officers and the non-commissioned members of the military.

A new reality is setting in. A new Middle East is coming, but it will be one that no one expects. Creative destruction and political manipulation can only go so far. What is certain is that the new Middle East will not be the one that Condoleezza Rice and Ehud Olmert bragged about when Israel was bombarding Lebanon in 2006. The U.S. establishment will eventually realize that humans cannot control chaos.

The Shifting Sands

All things are finite and no empire lasts forever. Rome’s empire fell and eventually somewhere down the road so will the global empire of the United States. Washington and its cohorts are now beginning to sink in the sands of the Middle East. The U.S. government has put the United States on the wrong side of history. If Mubarak was the modern pharaoh of Egypt, then on the world-stage the U.S. is the pharaoh. Washington too will eventually see disgrace if it does not listen to the growing chorus.

In Washington there is a belief that the Arab protests can be manipulated, but the sands are shifting. The people of the region have realized that people should not be afraid of their governments, their governments should be afraid of them. The Rome of today, Washington, has been stopped in its tracks in the lands of North Africa and Southwest Asia.

Revolution is underway in the petro-sheikhdom of Bahrain, while the U.S. and E.U. have been silent as the Bahraini military and foreign mercenaries with Saudi and Jordanian help have been unleashed on civilian protesters. The Palestinian people’s morale has been lifted and pressure is being put on Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority, which simply enforces the Israeli occupation in the West Bank. In Iraqi Kurdistan protests have started against Massoud Barzani and the Kurdistan Regional Government, which the U.S. and Britain have always tried to showcase as a model of Anglo-American success in Iraq. Protests have also broken out in Algeria, Jordan, Sudan, Iran, Turkey, and Libya. Yemen is rife with revolutionary fervour.

The bravery of the sons and daughters of Tunisia and Egypt have inspired and uplifted the Arabs as a whole and stirred the Turko-Arabo-Iranic World. Despite any attempts at managing these events, no one will be able to predict how they will play out. Still, one way or another, change will take shape.

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NOTES

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- [2] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (Hauppauge, N.Y.: Barron's Education Series, 2002), II.ii.44-45.
- [3] Sarah El Deeb and Hamza Hendawi, "ElBaradei calls on Egyptian army to intervene," *Associated Press* (AP), February 10, 2011.
- [4] Hamza Hendawi, "Analysis: Military Coup was behind Mubarak's exit," *Associated Press* (AP), February 11, 2011.
- [5] *Ibid.*
- [6] "Tunisia calls up reserve troops amid unrest," *Associated Press* (AP), February 7, 2011; Sofie Bouderbala, "Tunisian lawmakers approve emergency powers," *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), February 7, 2011; Kaouther Larbi, "Tunisia Senate grants leader wide powers," *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), February 10, 2011.
- [7] Philips Stewart, "U.S. and Egyptian military chiefs meet in Washington," ed. John O'Callaghan, *Reuters*, January 28, 2011; "Egypt general quits meeting to tend crisis at home," *Associated Press* (AP), January 28, 2011.
- [8] Elisabeth Bumiller, "Calling for Restraint, Pentagon Faces Test of Influence With Ally," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2011.
- [9] David E. Sanger, "Obama Presses Egypt's Military on Democracy," *The New York Times*, February, 2011, A7.
- [10] Hamza Hendawi and Maggie Michael, "Egypt protestors throng square after violence," *Associated Press* (AP), February 4, 2011.
- [11] *Ibid.*
- [12] Bumiller, "Pentagon Faces Test," *Op. cit.*

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