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## Much Ambiguity Overshadow Egypt's Future Route After Mubarak

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Encouraged by a somehow successful experience of youth uprising in Tunisia, Egypt's youth – free of any political or religious influence – organized online for the “day of anger” using the virtual social network *Facebook*. It is what came rapidly to materialize into a “Youth Revolution” taking place on January 25, not only in Cairo but also in another 11 main governorates out of the country's 29. Demonstrations initially raised the slogan of “Freedom, Dignity, Humanity” and were greatly admired and joined by various opposition currents.

The soon developed into “public revolution” came to reflect deteriorating domestic conditions and mounting state of instability that Egypt has been experiencing, particularly in the past few years. The main signs of this state were increased levels of unemployment, poverty, widespread corruption, lack of social justice, unclean control of businessmen on wealth and authority, sweeping Islamization of society, and mounting sectarian strife. The failure of state institutions to accommodate and correspond to people's needs has thus created a state of frustration among all segments of society from the ruling regime.

As anger days continued in Egypt, the situation went on in constant deterioration on all fronts.

- Increased street violence between pro and anti government protesters added to the weird opening of central prisons and massive release of approximately 17 thousand prisoners terrorizes ordinary citizens and spreads out chaos all over the country.
- The ugly economic face of the crisis rapidly developed with the dreadful lack of basic alimentary goods, fuel, and peoples' difficulty in accessing their bank accounts. Furthermore, destruction of properties, departure of foreign investors, fall and consequent closure of stock markets, suspension of all banks, and above all the miserable collapse of tourism came to mark the start of a huge economic crisis that Egypt would experience in the coming period even if a new democratic regime was finally destined to materialize.
- News about endangered open borders with Gaza Strip, Israel's decision to increase troops on its shared border with Egypt, Iran's applause of the ongoing revolution describing it as an Islamic rise, and the peculiar attack on the gas pipeline from Egypt to Israel at its terminal in the Sinai Peninsula are extremely alarming. These events pose endless question marks on the future route of Egypt's future foreign relations and possible implications on its integrity and national security in an unknown fate that the long stable country seems now to await in a post-Mubarak era.

As the standoff between the government and the public continued, the fragmentation of the opposition appeared as another main challenge. There has been an evident fragmentation of the opposition, ranging from political parties, socio-political movements, and Islamists, who failed to unite or reach consensus on who should lead the change in post-Mubarak Egypt. Some were supporting the idea of a save-the-nation government that encompasses all opposition currents; some were looking for a decisive role of the army to intervene in favor of the public and safeguard a peaceful transition of authority; some went to support the idea of consenting the newly appointed vice-president and ex-Intelligence Director, Omar Soliman, to temporarily lead a transitional phase until the next presidential

(\*) The opinions expressed herein are strictly personal and do not necessarily reflect the position of ISPI.

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elections of September 2011 take place; and others, were supporting certain individuals that suddenly – if not out of nowhere – appeared on the domestic scene. The talk regards mainly the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed el-Baradei, who came from Vienna where he was staying to join the demonstrations. Also, other individuals started to receive analysts and media attention like Egypt's ex-Foreign Minister and now Secretary General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa; and even Ahmad Zewail, the Egyptian-American Nobel Prize winner in chemistry, who decided to come from the US where he lives and works to – as he claimed – support public demands. Youth themselves, who have initiated this dignified revolution that reflects the legitimate demands of the Egyptian people, could not agree on who represents them. Conflicting wise-men committees were formed to reach a compromise between various opposition groups and the government but without success. It was a revolution without a leader and no leader succeeded to gain enough support or maintain a solid presence on the stage. In aggravation of the situation, the Islamists seemed to be out in full force. They were increasingly visible in the opposition, in various media coverage as well as in vitalizing street anger. They simply appeared to dominate the purity of the youth revolution and cease it for their own private political interests. Even with the recent Muslim Brothers' declaration that they will not run the upcoming presidential elections in September, their current status as a legitimate (rather than banned) political force is indeed a main political gain for the time being.

With the national dialogue now in course between Vice-President, Omar Soliman, and various opposition forces to reach a compromise on public demands, protesters continue their peaceful demonstrations fearing stagnation or a complete abortion of their revolution. Yet, the situation now in Egypt is plain that Mubarak's era is about to come to an end and so the question turns out to be what after Mubarak?

All opposition forces concentrated their demands on overthrowing Mubarak, amending the constitution, forming a national government, and dissolving the parliament. All these legitimate demands could be looked at as a preparatory phase for reform and democratization rather than reform and democratization in themselves. Also, while the youth revolution started by calling for economic and political reforms, now only political reforms dominate the domestic scene. Issues like raising the minimum limit of wages, controlling high prices of basic goods, and institutionalizing the process of curbing corruption are completely absent. Moreover, opposition parties appear to be frail with no clear programs elaborated or presidential candidates renowned. Therefore, much ambiguity seem to dominate the post-Mubarak era on both the country's internal and foreign fronts. On the domestic level, shall a peaceful transition of authority, and eventually free presidential elections next September, produce a less-corrupted democratic government that would be capable of significantly improving the economic conditions in the country? On the external level: what shall be the foreign orientation of the next regime? This second question is in fact the core concern of the US and many European powers, who are keen to maintain close relations with Egypt for its strategic location, its Peace Treaty with Israel, and its weight and mobilization ability in the Arab region. Other regional actors, most importantly Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah, await with much enthusiasm to see a vigorous Egyptian foreign policy that pays heed to the Arab and Islamic causes more than to narrow Egyptian interests. All these questions remain without decisive answers. Yet, it would be indeed inevitable for the coming government to introduce reforms, enhance democratic practice and adopt a different foreign policy outlook to regain people's trust. The authenticity of this different route may remain however a matter of style rather than of substance. Only the coming years would tell.

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