

# Egypt: A Sleeping Giant Awakens

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*Poor people gonna rise up  
And get their share  
Poor people gonna rise up  
And take what's theirs*

And finally the tables are starting to turn

*Talkin' bout a revolution*

- Tracy Chapman's *Talkin' Bout A Revolution*, 1988

The sleeping Egyptian giant has finally awoken.

The Arab world's most populous nation—85 million strong—has been in political hibernation for 30 long years.

The deep slumber is now over. The reign of Hosni Mubarak will end, sooner or later, as a rejuvenated population sheds apathy's blanket.

After Israel, Egypt is the second-largest recipient of United States foreign aid. Other than what was embezzled, the \$1.5 billion in annual assistance has been spent entirely on the military and bolstering Mubarak's internal security apparatus. It ultimately ensured the Camp David state remained complaint with the diktats coming out of Tel Aviv and Washington.

Indeed, as a result of peace treaties with its eastern and southern neighbors, Israel has had a free hand in continuing the repression and subjugation of Palestinians.

Take, for example, the crippling, inhumane siege imposed on Gaza. Even the most basic good and supplies were prevented from entering the tiny enclave. (This was the price Palestinians paid for holding democratic elections, which Hamas handily won.) Egypt, to no one's surprise, enforced all embargo restrictions asked of it.

When Israel launched a vicious military campaign upon Gaza's destitute population in December 2008, Egypt again became a willing accomplice. Many will contend Mubarak was complicit in those war crimes. By keeping the Rafah border crossing closed, he prevented the evacuation of both malnourished and maimed from a war zone.

Although Egyptians may have quietly seethed at this, it does not compare to the anger and

resentment built up over decades of corruption and abuse. The people have grown weary of Emergency Law, implemented and maintained since Anwar Sadat's 1981 assassination, that prohibits all forms of free speech, expression and assembly. It allows for the indefinite detention of any person without charge. Arrested civilians are then put on trial in front of closed military tribunals. The regime is also notorious for turning a blind eye to routine police brutality and torture.

In a Jan. 30 appearance on *Meet the Press*, Sec. of State Hillary Clinton commented on Mubarak's inevitable removal from power:

"It needs to be an orderly, peaceful transition to real democracy, not faux democracy like the elections we saw in Iran two years ago, where you have one election 30 years ago and then the people just keep staying in power and become less and less responsive to their people."

Iran ? Or Egypt ? Although far from perfect, Iran has held far more credible presidential elections than Egypt ever has. Why not hearken to Egypt 's "faux democracy" of just *two months ago* when Mubarak's National Democratic Party captured an amazing 420 of 518 parliamentary seats (while the Muslim Brotherhood's independents went from 88 to one)?

It was a telling self-indictment. The U.S has always tolerated the trappings of democracy in Mubarak's Egypt , including a rubber-stamp parliament and elections where opposition candidates were either banned or unable to run due to an avalanche of bureaucratic obstacles.

Because he assumed his son Gamal would succeed him, Mubarak also never appointed a vice-president, in violation of Egypt 's constitution. That was until a few days ago when intelligence chief Omar Suleiman was hastily promoted to the job. Gamal has since fled to London .

In Tuesday's protests, the scope of which was unprecedented in the history of modern Egypt , the world's eyes were fixed on downtown Cairo 's Tahrir Square . The hundreds of thousands gathered not only called for Mubarak's ouster, but demanded he be put on trial. His hanging effigy conveyed to viewers that Egyptians will not be satisfied with a token cabinet reshuffle.

" Cairo today is all of Egypt ," said one. "I want my son to have a better life and not suffer as much as I did ... I want to feel like I chose my president."

Feeling the pressure, Jordan's monarch King Abdullah II fired his cabinet as demonstrations in Amman continued. The Palestinian Authority under the discredited president Mahmoud Abbas vowed to hold municipal elections in the West Bank . Bahrain is ripe with discontent, to say the least. The same is true for Yemen, where President Ali Abdullah Saleh—who has ruled for 32-years—now says he won't run for another term. Tunisians have already taken matters into their own hands.

Despite the best efforts of Mubarak, Saudi Arabia, the United States and Israel, the sleeping giant has awoken. And the mass protests we are witnessing in Egypt today ... that is merely a yawn.

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