

Egyptian Uprising Must Address U.S Interference and the Role of Israel in the Region

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As an analyst and observer of the recent rebellions in the Middle East, specifically Egypt, I want to make three developing observations. First, the Egyptian people cannot confront local despots and “regime change” without addressing the patron of Mubarak’s regime—The United States. Second, because of the U.S’ influence and because Egypt is so strategically important to the U.S-Israel agenda for the Middle East, the U.S will attempt to control their investments and their interests by regaining control and maintaining patronage. In other words it will attempt (or may have already attempted) to co-opt the public uprising and manage it at some level and continue to do so. Last, in order to adequately address foreign meddlers within the context of the local region and its politics, one must also eventually address the role of Israel.

Local Revolution must Condemn Western Influence:

The images coming from the streets of Egypt bring a glimmer of hope to all in the Middle East as well as to anyone around the world who is serious about justice. Yet as I watch these images (as a Palestinian-Egyptian from the west) there is one thing that is alarmingly and frustratingly absent—cries of popular condemnation of and rebellion against the U.S’ influence and role in Egypt. There are denunciations of the puppet—Mubarak—but not of those who pull his strings. Any uprising against Mubarak that does not also confront foreign meddling is ultimately flawed and shortsighted. Revolutions against Arab despots must also address these dictators’ western over-lords and the latter’s ongoing colonial/imperial agenda for the region.

An Egyptian uprising that does not simultaneously confront imperialism and the heavy hands of the U.S and Israel is ultimately vulnerable to co-option and micro-management. Any new government (even if it succeeds in resolving the domestic issues of corruption, unemployment and food prices) that continues to receive 1.5 billion dollars in “aid” (i.e. bribery) will be a mere continuation of the Middle Eastern Banana Republic that Egypt is and has been for more than thirty years. It should be noted that the principal recipient of aid in Egypt is the Egyptian military and the vast internal security apparatus (with whom it shares the same branch of government). Consequently the role of the military and the security apparatus—whose patronage cannot allow them to be neutral and therefore *genuinely* stand with the people—is something that the protesters will inevitably have to contend with when addressing any reforms that may affect the issue of “security.”

U.S Attempting to Co-opt and Manage Egyptian Uprising

The lack of Egyptian condemnation of the U.S and its influence in Egypt may lead to

speculations that the U.S is behind these uprisings. The United States has indeed been co-opting and courting Egyptian protest groups (especially youth dissidents) in an effort to work both sides within Egypt [1]. Chossudovsky aptly describes the U.S' political double-speech as chatting with dictators while they mingle with dissidents [Ibid]. While I agree with much of the analysis I diverge on the issue of whether or not the *current* popular uprisings in Egypt are being directed by the U.S. Though the U.S has co-opted many opposition groups, what we are witnessing currently on the streets of Egypt is far-vaster in scale than a few meetings with Egyptian youth activists in Washington. I believe that even though the U.S administration has been attempting to appropriate certain opposition elements in Egypt (something it often does in client states), the current popular uprising took even them by surprise.

Moreover, Egypt's neighbour and the US' biggest ally and recipient of aid in the region, Israel, seems to be officially holding its tongue, clearly indicating that it is not pleased with this moment. In a recent Haaretz article Israeli media admits that Western and Israeli intelligence did not foresee a change of this scope. While Israeli and U.S intelligence did "predict" possible civil unrest and/or regime change in the Middle East (namely Egypt and Saudi Arabia), "a popular uprising like this was completely unexpected" [2]. In another Haaretz article it is maintained that the new IDF intelligence chief failed to predict the current popular uprising in Egypt [3]. If the Israelis (the eyes and ears of the U.S in the region) are admitting this then by extension, the U.S must also have failed to anticipate the scope of what is now developing into a full-fledged revolution. Gideon Levy, writing in Haaretz even applauds the Egyptian uprising:

"The masses of the Egyptian people- please note: on all levels- took their fate in their hands. There is something impressive and cheering in that." [4]

While it may not have anticipated or orchestrated the current uprising, what the U.S is now attempting to do is to ultimately be able to control what is happening presently. As the "day of anger" spread into many days of wrath without any indication of dying down, the U.S has shifted its official stance on the uprisings and is increasingly and deceptively trying to present itself as a friend and ally of the protesters. Again, while they are not behind the uprising, there is a clear indication that the U.S seeks to appear supportive of the people in order to deflect criticism of its own role in the country and region and to position itself in order to co-opt and appropriate (typically meaning to threaten and/or bribe) any incoming or opposition government.

That the U.S is trying to cozy-up to the popular uprising and control it *after the fact* is evidenced in their repeated insistence on the restoration of social networking as a "right" after Mubarak disabled Internet capabilities [5]. Had a U.S- led campaign using online services like facebook and twitter been the catalyst for the uprising, then one might have expected the revolution to diminish as a result of Mubarak shutting down Internet and cell phone service; no such diminution occurred. Moreover, repeated cries from the highest levels of the U.S administration (including Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama) that in addition to the fundamental rights of democracy and free speech, Egyptians should have the "basic right to use social media" [6] (since when did Internet social networking become a basic human right?!), suggests that the U.S is eager to get ahead of the curve and control the uprising, using the Internet as one possible tool.

To demonstrate how much the U.S has depended on the Internet and social networking sites

to co-opt opposition in Egypt, one should note that U.S officials have met in the past with dissidents from the April 6 Movement [7] (a youth opposition movement in Egypt that interesting exists mainly online through facebook). This notwithstanding, to reiterate my earlier point, the current uprisings are far vaster than anything the U.S may have been attempting to steer in the past, and have continued despite the shutdown of the Internet and the loss of social networking sites as an “organizing medium.”

In another, more obvious attempt at control, a “secret US file” relating to the aforementioned youth dissident group was leaked (most likely by the US administration). The document discloses U.S “support for Egypt protests” [8]. Clearly, in an effort to appear sympathetic to the authentic Egyptian uprising, the U.S is now shamelessly admitting that it has in the past attempted to co-opt youth dissidents, thus showing its hand at playing both sides in Egypt. In reality this self-leaked “secret document” does not show any authentic U.S support for Egyptian protesters and opposition as much as it proves that they have been infiltrating and co-opting social movements and activists in Egypt, specifically via Internet social networking sites.

In the most recent and brazen attempt to spin the U.S as the ally and anchor of the revolution, mainstream media in the west are openly declaring that the US has been secretly backing the leaders of the Egyptian uprising all along [9]. Such mainstream media framing serves to solidify the U.S as a supposed ally of the revolution while also deflecting much-needed criticism of U.S foreign policy and interference in Egypt and the Middle East. These narratives are intended more for western audiences and one hopes that Egyptians will not fall for this manipulative spin, damage control and blatant attempts at co-option.

Addressing the role of Israel in the Region

One cannot say enough about the special nature of the relationship (at all levels) between the State of Israel and the existing regime in Egypt. U.S aid and influence serve to ensure and solidify this warped relationship (after all the U.S funds the military budget of both nations). U.S aid to Egypt and control of the current regime is intended to support Israel and Israeli regional policy. U.S foreign policy in the region is contradictory at best. While the U.S claims to prefer secular regimes in the Middle East, it opposes or opposed the two main secular regimes of Syria and Iraq under Saddam Hussein [10]. And while it supposedly promotes democracy in the region, it is close friends and allies with Saudi Arabia and Egypt while shunning democratically elected Hamas [11], and the democratic process in Lebanon. As Gilad Atzmon succinctly and aptly explains,

“American policy seems to be a total mess — unless one is willing to openly admit that there is a clear coherent thread running through American foreign policy: it simply serves Israel’s interests.” [12]

In this respect we cannot critically address the U.S without also addressing those whose interests it serves—Israel. And as a puppet of the U.S administration, the Egyptian state has played a “special” role in protecting Israeli interests. These include signing a peace treaty with Israel, maintaining an Israeli security perimeter on its borders, constant intelligence leading to the bombing of supply tunnels, and closing the borders to Gaza.

Yet it is obvious that the Egyptian people have never been happy with their government’s relationship with Israel. Israeli journalist Gideon Levy correctly points out that one thing all opposition groups in Egypt share is a disdain for Israel. Levy even seems to admit that such

disdain is justified given Israel's illegal actions against the Palestinian people:

"As long the masses in Egypt and in the entire Arab world continue seeing the images of tyranny and violence from the occupied territories, Israel will not be able to be accepted, even if it is acceptable to a few regimes" [13].

Clearly, necessary criticism of Israel already exists within the Egyptian opposition, and it seems that the Israeli media is well aware of these sentiments. Mainstream North American media, on the other hand, are reluctant to link anything happening in Egypt with foreign policy concerning Israel and Egyptian sentiment around it. But let us hope that as the Egyptian revolution continues the Egyptian people and opposition will loudly articulate an anti-Israeli stance and long-term agenda. There will be more to say about this as the situation develops.

Conclusion

Overall, it is apparent that the U.S is (unsuccessfully) attempting to control and manage the uprising in Egypt—especially among the youth. Its schizophrenic shift in its official stance on the uprising (first condemning it, then supporting it, then going as far as to leak its own "secret" documents in an effort to suggest that it has been behind the uprising all along) suggests that they did not orchestrate the uprising but are currently scrambling to try and contain and control it in a manner that will allow them to once again pull the strings of whomever rules the country. Lets hope that the Egyptian people and *their* revolution are able to resist such brazen efforts. In order for them to do so they must extend their revolt to include a critical reassessment of their relationship with the U.S—and the Israeli interests it serves—and its foreign meddling in and control of Egypt and the region. This implicitly entails (finally) confronting the problem of the Zionist regime-Israel.

Predictions

I want to end by making a couple of predictions regarding what to look for in terms of the U.S' response to the revolts and its relationship with Egypt [14]:

- The US will further attempt to manipulate the revolution and position itself to control/threaten/bribe the new government, mainly by gaining the trust of the people vis-a-vis the military (note that mainstream media have already begun to praise the military as a "friend of the revolution")
- The US will protect Israel's interests (directly or indirectly) by attempting to display a consistent bi-partisanship about Egypt within the US government. This bi-partisanship will have "security" as their main concern, employing double-speak in reference to "Egyptian security," which is actually code for Israel's security. Bi-partisan committees with a rainbow of representation will likely emerge in the coming days and weeks (look for AIPAC to instruct these committees as to how to proceed).
- Israel may (much further down the road) attempt to make a bid for the Sinai. Since the U.S patronage of Egypt has been in the service of Israel, the ways in which it will attempt to control and co-opt any

new or resultant government will also surely be in the service of Israel. Part of this service may entail helping to try and create a situation or conflict (i.e. a security or “terrorist” crisis on Israel’s southern borders, probably relating to Gaza) that would allow or “force” Israel to re-occupy the Sinai. Look for this to take shape over a span of the next couple years. Israeli media is already discussing IDF reformulations for its southern border.

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Notes

[1] Michel Chossudovsky <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=22993>

[2] <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/egypt-riots-are-an-intelligence-chief-s-nightmare-1.340027>

[3] <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/new-idf-intelligence-chief-failed-to-predict-egypt-uprising-1.340062>

[4] <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-egyptian-masses-won-t-play-ally-to-israel-1.340080>

[5] <http://news.antiwar.com/2011/01/28/protests-swell-as-obama-mubarak-trade-lip-service-platitudes/>

[6] Ibid.

[7] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/8289686/Egypt-protests-Americas-secret-backing-for-rebel-leaders-behind-uprising.html>

[8] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/8289698/Egypt-protests-secret-US-document-discloses-support-for-protesters.html>

[9] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/8289686/Egypt-protests-Americas-secret-backing-for-rebel-leaders-behind-uprising.html>

[10] <http://www.gilad.co.uk/writings/gilad-atzmon-liberating-the-american-people.html>

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[1 3]

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-egyptian-masses-won-t-play-ally-to-israel-1.340080>

[14] Special thanks to Silvestre Lilly for helping me to flesh out these ideas.

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