

Washington's Plan B: Why Obama Fears Democracy in Egypt

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Raising Lazarus from the dead would be easier than reviving the Egyptian President. So Obama is on to plan B. And as it turns out, plan B looks a lot like the status-quo, minus a change of face. The new face is a man handpicked by the U.S., Mohamed ElBaradei, a UN bureaucrat who hasn't lived in Egypt in decades and is virtually unknown by the Egyptian people. Placing ElBaradei in power will take behind the scenes political maneuvering combined with military repression, a plan that will collide with the revolutionary demands of the people.

The U.S. has already succeeded in gaining support for its plan from the Muslim Brotherhood, the strongest opposition group in Egypt, which has lost much respect from its rank and file for collaborating too closely with Mubarak. Recently, the Brotherhood has attempted to hold back the revolution, to no avail. Now, they've promised support to ElBaradei, who is set to negotiate some kind of transition with Mubarak. The New York Times reports:

"The Egyptian uprising, which emerged as a disparate and spontaneous grass-roots movement, began to coalesce Sunday, as the largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, threw its support behind a leading secular opposition figure, Mohamed ElBaradei, to negotiate on behalf of the forces seeking the fall of President Hosni Mubarak...Though lacking deep support on his own, Mohammed ElBaradei, a Nobel laureate, could serve as consensus figure for a movement that has struggled to articulate a program for a potential transition." (January 30, 2011).

The U.S. media has shamefully tried to promote ElBaradei as a popular figure, attempting to assign him credibility by showing non-stop footage of him speaking through a bullhorn at a protest, even as they admit he lacks "deep support on his own." Few in Egypt know who he is.

Nevertheless, Reuters reported that Elbaradei "... had a mandate [from whom it doesn't say] to speak to the army and organize a handover to a national unity coalition." We must assume the "mandate" is from the U.S., who continues to maneuver behind the scenes. Interestingly, the same article says that ElBaradei

"... called on U.S. President Barack Obama to "cut off life support to the dictator." But he [Obama] remained cautious of abandoning a key Middle Eastern ally. Obama urged only a shift in Egypt's administration to take more account of popular opinion." (January 30, 2011).

Egyptians want their dictator's regime to end, but Obama wants only a "shift in Egypt's administration." These are clashing demands. Indeed, since the events in Egypt began,

Obama has been busily speaking through both sides of his mouth.

His administration continued to give support to the dictator as protesters were being shot in the street. Obama called for calm “from both sides,” giving equal credibility to the murderous dictatorship and the masses of people who demanded he leave. It should be obvious that, if the protesters “show restraint,” as Obama wants, the dictatorship would stay in place.

An editorial in Al-Jazeera pointed out this hypocritical approach, entitled President Obama, Use the D-Word [democracy]:

“... president Obama has refused to take a strong stand in support of the burgeoning pro-democracy movement ...Mubarak [the dictator] continued through yesterday to be praised as a crucial partner of the U.S. Most important, there has been absolutely no call for real democracy... only “reform” has been suggested to the Egyptian government so that, in Obama’s words, “people have mechanisms in order to express legitimate grievances.” (January 30, 2011).

This implies that Obama’s definition of “reform” is simply a change of the regime’s face.

As of this writing, Reuters reported that Mubarak might take part in talks with opposition groups, possibly Elbaradei. If the U.S. succeeds in installing Elbaradei as President, with an element of popular support via the Muslim Brotherhood, the army will remain a crucial element in Egyptian politics, whose upper stratum maintain close ties — politically and financially — to the U.S. government. But Egypt’s army isn’t reliable either.

The same Reuters article explains:

“Protests have affected cities across Egypt. In Suez, on the canal, one senior local [army] officer, Brigadier Atef Said said his troops would give protesters a free voice: “We will allow protests in the coming days,” he told Reuters. “Everyone has the right to voice their opinion.”

and:

“In surreal scenes in Cairo, soldiers stood by tanks covered in anti-Mubarak graffiti: “Down with Mubarak. Down with the despot. Down with the traitor. Pharaoh out of Egypt.”...Asked how they could let people scrawl anti-Mubarak slogans on their mostly American-made vehicles, one soldier said: “These are written by the people. It’s the views of the people.”

This army will find it difficult to suppress the inevitable protests if Elbaradei is installed as a U.S. puppet; inevitable because he will follow the path laid by Mubarak: support of U.S. military presence in the region; support of Israeli policy against the Palestinians; support of U.S. free-market economic policy; and support of further U.S. aggression against neighboring countries like Iran.

In short, any regime that continues to support U.S. policies will be a dictatorship, something the Egyptian people clearly do not want. If the Muslim Brotherhood props up such a government, they will be completely exposed and discredited by their own members, and a tremendous void will be left open, to be filled by the self-organization of the Egyptian people.

Egyptians will be demanding that the U.S. stops meddling in their internal affairs by politically supporting unpopular governments, for example, by providing \$2 billion in mostly military aid. Those in the U.S. who support democracy must be demanding the same thing.

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