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*Interview*

REVOLT IN EGYPT

A. THE MOVEMENT

*After a reign of thirty years, Mubarak was overthrown by a popular movement in less than three weeks. How did the uprising originate?*

OVER THE LAST few years, a rebellion had been brewing under the surface. There was a general sense that the status quo could not be sustained. Movies, novels, songs were permeated by the theme of revolt: it was everywhere in people's imagination. Two developments were responsible for making ordinary, apolitical Egyptians feel they could no longer carry on with their normal lives. The first was the dissolution of the social contract governing state–society relations since Nasser's coup in the fifties. The contract involved a tacit exchange: the regime offered free education, employment in an expanding public sector, affordable healthcare, cheap housing and other forms of social protection, in return for obedience. You could have—or at any rate hope for—these benefits, so long as domestic or foreign policies were not questioned and political power was not contested. In other words, people understood that they were trading their political rights for social welfare. From the eighties onwards, this contract was eroded, but it was not until the new millennium that it was fully abrogated. By this time the regime felt that it had eliminated organized resistance so thoroughly that it no longer needed to pay the traditional social bribes to guarantee political acquiescence. Viewing a population that appeared utterly passive, fragmented and demoralized, the regime believed it was time for plunder, on a grand scale. In the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), a faction clustered around the President's son Gamal

Mubarak increasingly took charge through a new body called the Policy Committee. It had two components. One consisted of corrupt, state-nurtured capitalists with monopoly control over profitable sectors of the economy. The other was composed of neo-liberal intellectuals, typically economists with links to international financial institutions.

In 2004, the businessmen's cabinet of Ahmed Nazif marked the first time this group actually took over government. Monopoly capitalists assumed cabinet positions relevant to their fields of activity. For example, Mohamed Mansour, one of the biggest car dealers in Egypt, became Minister of Transport. A tycoon in the tourist industry, Zoheir Garraneh, became Minister of Tourism. Neo-liberal intellectuals were no less prominent. The Minister of Investment, Mahmoud Mohieddin, went on to become Managing Director of the World Bank in 2010. The Minister of Finance, Youssef Boutros-Ghaly, was a senior IMF executive, and remained linked to the Fund, for example, by chairing the International Monetary and Financial Committee, the main policy-planning body advising its Board of Governors. The result was a combination of outrageous looting by these insider capitalists, and blatant neo-liberal exactions on the population. The budgetary process was reorganized, services were privatized and a new fiscal regime introduced. In 2005, corporate tax rates were cut in half, from 40 to 20 per cent of earnings, though even this was rarely paid, while taxes falling on the mass of the population were sharply raised—most notoriously on housing. In 2010, many Egyptians with no property other than the roof over their heads, living on pensions of less than \$50 a month, were suddenly faced with steep tax bills for their homes. The result was such a level of protest, with pleas and appeals to the President to intervene, that Mubarak suspended implementation of the new tax two months before it was due to come into force. By 2010, however, the belief was widespread that Mubarak was not going to run for the Presidency again in September of this year, but pass it on to his son. The prospect of Gamal, no longer heir apparent, but exercising absolute power with his cronies, scared many people. Life was already extremely difficult economically for most Egyptians. What would it be like if there was no appeal against him, and everything he had come to represent?

Parallel with this social change, and related to it, was an alteration in the forms of political repression by the regime. Back in the fifties and sixties, it was understood that you would suffer arrest or torture only if you were politically organized. The military took care of domestic repression,

which was brutal but highly targeted. In the seventies and early eighties, this function was transferred from the army to the police. Repression now became more indiscriminate, but it was still carried out within a discernible structure and certain limits. Calling the shots were colonels or captains, people with names and ranks and faces, who bore some kind of responsibility for the decisions they took, and you still had to have some kind of political involvement—not necessarily organized, now, but saying something that crossed a red line or upset some official—to fall into their hands. By the nineties, however, the regime had become so confident it faced no challenges that it treated criticism in the press, or on satellite television or later the internet, as harmless banalities. This was also the attitude taken by the police: day-to-day repression of citizens was too mundane to be carried out by uniformed officers. Why would police officers waste their time and energy on intimidating a few students, cracking down on the occasional hot-headed labour organizer or molesting some female human-rights activists to keep them off the streets?

So, more and more, plain-clothes assistants were used for these tasks. Sadat had started to use low-level thugs of this kind in the seventies, but on a very small scale. In order not to implicate the police, raids were passed off as manifestations of popular support for the regime. Mubarak employed them in parliamentary elections in the eighties. From the nineties onwards, however, deployment of these seasonally hired thugs, on the pay-roll but not in the ranks of the police, became the norm, and with it repression became far more random. They would often harass or manhandle ordinary people for no political reason, simply for purposes of extortion. It was a dramatic case of this widespread phenomenon which eventually triggered the uprising. Khaled Said was an educated youth in his twenties, from a good family in Alexandria. In the summer of 2010, he exchanged words with a couple of these police assistants in an internet cafe, so they simply smashed his face on the pavement. Later they claimed he was suspected of carrying drugs, and that, before they could search him, he committed suicide. Pictures of him were soon everywhere on the internet. In Dubai, a Google executive named Wael Ghonim created a group on Facebook called 'We are all Khaled Said', and asked everyone who had faced this kind of barbarism to join it. In a couple of months, over a hundred thousand people had done so. This was the contingency that started the whole movement. Behind it was this double deterioration—in the scale of economic exploitation and plunder, and in the extent of arbitrary molestation and repression—that

made the lives of ordinary Egyptians who had nothing to do with politics increasingly unbearable.

*Khaled Said was killed in the summer of 2010. What explains the timing of the revolt six months later?*

January 25 is a national holiday commemorating the heroic resistance of police officers in Ismailia, a city on the Suez Canal, against a British force that asked them to hand over their weapons on that day in 1952. Over forty officers were killed and dozens injured in what became known as Police Day. To underline the contrast between the police back then and the police now, the ‘We are all Khaled Said’ group decided to stage a demonstration near the State Security headquarters in downtown Cairo, in Tahrir Square. They hoped for a turnout of about 5–7,000, but even that seemed too far-fetched at the time. Under Mubarak, the largest demonstrations had never exceeded a few hundred people. But encouraged by the fall of the Tunisian dictatorship on January 14, and supported by other internet-based and opposition groups, the call brought out perhaps 20,000 people.

Over the next two days, not only did protests continue, but different oppositional groups came together for a bigger mobilization. Now the police began to hose and tear-gas them. Instead of making them back down, police brutality fuelled another major protest after Friday Prayers on January 28, the Day of Rage. Coming together from different assembly points, and gathering steam as they marched towards Tahrir Square, crowds snowballing to some 80,000-strong were now ready to take on the police. Caught off-balance by the size and persistence of the demonstrators, the police were finally overwhelmed. It was a rude awakening. Suddenly the police were confronted with the reality that, as a result of the transformations I have described, they were not equipped or trained to deal with massive unrest. What ensued was an epic battle on the Qasr al-Nil Bridge, which links Tahrir Square to the west of the city where most of the demonstrators were coming from. If you examine the videos of this battle, you can see how incompetent and disorganized the repression proved to be—the police clumsily manoeuvring a handful of armoured vehicles, zig-zagging about in the crowds and trying to hit people, bombarding them with assorted missiles, and then beating a retreat, hosing and shooting at people, which only made them angrier. After a couple of hours of this tug-of-war, personnel carriers were overturned by

demonstrators, the police withdrew, abandoning not just the bridge but the whole centre of the city, while crowds torched the headquarters of the NDP and occupied the Square. At this point, the Minister of the Interior told Mubarak that the situation was out of control, and the army needed to come in. Troops were deployed around strategic sites and government buildings across the city, a curfew was declared, and by the next morning the military was out in force.

*What were the forces behind the mobilization of January 28, and to what extent were they coordinating among themselves?*

We can speak of some six groups propelling the movement. Two were based on Facebook networks. The first was the 'We are all Khaled Said' group of which I have spoken. The second was the April 6 Youth Movement, which came into being around support for a general strike called for that date in 2008. Only one of the small industrial towns of the Delta heeded the call, and there the workers were brutally repressed, with some shot and killed. The following year, the organizers of the support set up a Facebook account called the April 6 Youth Movement and asked everyone to stay at home on that same day rather than mass on the streets. The police made sure that nothing happened, but by 2010 the group had some 70,000 members. So it was older and had a more political profile, combining labour and liberal concerns, than the network created by Wael Ghonim. Although a mass demonstration was contrary to their strategy of a stay-at-home strike, they decided to join forces with 'We are all Khaled Said' for the mobilization in January.

A third important group was the Youth of the Muslim Brotherhood that had emerged in the last three years. Within the Brotherhood, reformers had for some time been trying to change the traditional positions and strategies of the movement. Their aim was to form a political party with its own organization and leaders, linked only loosely to the general cultural movement of the Muslim Brotherhood. Their campaign was further fuelled by news that the movement's gains in the 2005 parliamentary elections, in which it won 88 seats, was part of the State Security's plan to dissuade the US from pressuring Mubarak to democratize. In other words, the movement's leaders willingly played into the regime's hands, accepting the undignified role of a scarecrow. In 2010 reformers experienced a serious setback, when a conservative old-guard figure was elected General Guide and ignored calls to join secular

opposition groups in boycotting the fraudulent elections staged by the regime. To add insult to injury, the Brotherhood's complicity was not rewarded; it did not secure a single seat in the new parliament. From that point on, the Youth of the Muslim Brotherhood openly challenged its Guidance Council, called on reformers to resign from it and go ahead with forming a political party anyway. So when the call for a demonstration on January 25 went out, they decided to join it.

A fourth group was composed of what might be called a 'new left' in Egypt. These were mostly young and middle-aged leftists, whose relations with the original leaders of the Communist movement were not unlike those of the Youth of the Muslim Brotherhood to the Guidance Council. The Communist veterans, who go back to the middle of the last century, are now old men who made their peace with the regime a long time ago. Their excuse was that Islamization poses the biggest threat to Egypt, and that commitment to secularism binds them to the supposedly liberal ruling group. They therefore agreed to play according to the regime's rulebook, which allowed them to write and lecture, while forbidding them from building a real base among the working class. But for younger leftists, there were threats other than Islamization, namely, unbridled neo-liberal exploitation. From their perspective, the priority was to organize resistance in the factories. So for at least five years, they had been trying to develop a force of their own, creating, among other things, a journal called *Al-Bousla—The Compass* in Arabic—to bring together the most active layers of the Egyptian Left. These are mostly urban intellectuals, many of them assistant professors—young historians, political scientists or sociologists.

A fifth group had gathered around Mohamed El-Baradei, the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, who came back to Egypt last year and let it be known he would run for President if the Constitution were changed to allow free elections. Rumour has it that El-Baradei had a falling-out with Mubarak, because as an ambassador he was once Egypt's official nominee for the top position at the IAEA, but at the last minute the president ditched him for another nominee. El-Baradei was elected nonetheless, but with African votes. After that he kept his distance from the regime, though Mubarak had to treat him with some respect because of his international standing. On getting back to Cairo, he attracted disenfranchised youngsters around a general appeal for reform, without more definite contours, creating a group

called the National Association for Change. It is a medley of individuals, ranging from liberals to progressive Islamists to a handful of leftists, some affiliated with political parties, notably the Democratic Front, and many freelancers. One of the main spokesmen of this group was the son of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, a high-profile cleric; others were young entrepreneurs and corporate executives. But El-Baradei still spent most of his time in Europe, preferring to play the role of inspirer rather than effectual leader of the group. The result was again a group of angry young men left to their own devices. The perfect storm gathering in January 2011 had just found another collaborator.

Finally, a sixth group consisted of a disparate collection of human-rights activists, who had been working either for Egyptian outfits, or Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch or other international organizations. This was a very eclectic collection of young people united only by the fact that they had not found any political organization capable of mobilizing them to contest the regime more directly. The common characteristic of all six groups is that they were disillusioned with the traditional alternatives to the dictatorship. They benefited from contemporary communication technologies, of course. In the big cities, internet cafes are everywhere, and even the poor have cell-phones. This is principally a culture of youth, but it is very widely available, across social classes. But social network sites, one must note, played a role in the preliminary stages only. Once the snowball started rolling, their value depreciated in favour of more traditional media, such as television and radio.

*From the demonstration of January 28 onwards, Tahrir Square was continuously occupied by protesters. On February 1, a still larger demonstration there demanded that Mubarak go. The next day, police thugs let loose to attack the occupation were driven from the Square. A much larger mobilization followed on February 4. Strikes had become widespread by February 7. On February 10 the Supreme Military Council was in session for the first time since 1973. Mubarak fell on February 11, to a continuously expanding popular uprising. How should its social composition be described?*

The crowds in Tahrir Square represented the critical mass of Egyptian society, extending from the lower-middle to the upper-middle class. There you could find everyone from wealthy businessmen and traders on the stock exchange to clerks and shopkeepers, porters and security

guards. Across this gamut, there were people of all ages, from grandparents to small children, of both sexes and both major confessions. Women were active from the very first day, veiled old mothers and unveiled female activists holding hands. Very striking in the crowds was the complete absence of sexual harassment, which has become a serious issue in Egyptian street life in the last couple of years. Likewise there was no tension between Muslims and Copts. For quite some time the Ministry of the Interior had been covertly fanning antagonism between the two communities, but from day one of the movement you could see Christians holding hands and forming a circle around Muslims when they were praying, and Muslims forming a cordon around Christians when they were at Mass in the Square.

*The working class?*

In terms of the distribution of income, factory workers belong to the lower-middle ranks of Egyptian society, and they too were active from the first day; not in Tahrir Square, but in Alexandria, which has many big factories on its outskirts, and in provincial cities around the country. A common estimate is that the whole revolt may have involved between 10 and 15 million people; of these a maximum of 5 million in Cairo. In the part played by workers in the movement, demonstrations came before strikes. There was a huge amount of popular turbulence across the country in every kind of economic setting, from the Canal cities of Port Said, Ismailia and Suez to tourist oases of the Western desert. In the al-Wahat oases, where a luxury hotel is being carved into the mountains at huge cost and millions are being spent on opulent tourist amenities, while the local people get virtually nothing, social anger was so strong that the police chief had to be transferred for firing on demonstrators, even before Mubarak fell. Repression and exploitation were the two matches setting fire to popular action; repression affecting the more affluent ranks of the middle class, and exploitation the lower ones.

Strikes came later, four days before Mubarak fell. These were common in the last few years: it is estimated that some two million workers had been involved in some kind of strike activity over the previous decade. But strikes had been by and large apolitical, restricted to wage demands, resistance to lay-offs, pressure for earlier retirement; and they had been strictly local—there had never been an attempt at any industrial action on a national scale. That was in part because surveillance was so tight



that workers only organized strikes with those they knew and trusted, who lived next door to them, close by the factory. They lacked the confidence necessary for national strikes, because they could not extend the same trust to workers from other neighbourhoods or provinces. So long, too, as demands were just for modest economic improvements, the regime tolerated them—Gamal did not want to frighten away foreign investors by shooting strikers—and could even treat them as a kind of late remnant of the social contract it had otherwise scrapped. But once the uprising had begun, any strike acquired a political force and gave momentum to the revolt. In the final days before Mubarak fell, strike leaders began to call for the creation of an independent national confederation of labour in place of the dummy trade-unions of the dictatorship. All this certainly shook the regime. But connexions between the leadership of the strikes and the organizations mobilizing in the Square were very weak, and it would be wrong to imagine that industrial action was the straw that broke the camel's back.

*What about the sub-proletariat of the slums in Cairo and the other big cities?*

These are the poorest of the poor, whom many feared might one day stage an Egyptian *jacquerie*. In and around Cairo, they numbered between five and six million people, living in subhuman conditions—shanty towns with no running water, no electricity, no sewage system, no schools. The Arabic word for these places is *ashwa'iyyat*, coming from a root word meaning 'random'. The dwellers of the *ashwa'iyyat* are random—contingent human beings for those with a settled life, whom they terrify, as people possessing nothing, descending from their sinister habitats on the ordered city, speaking a strangely distorted Arabic, desperately looking for jobs, stealing goods and harassing citizens before retreating to their dark world. Might they not one day ransack the city and burn it down? Fortunately, this menacing human mass was entirely absent from the revolt, which probably contributed to its civilized and peaceful character. A day before Mubarak stepped down, activists in Alexandria were planning to summon it into the city, to swell the numbers of the movement even more. Had they done so, it would no doubt have sown panic throughout the country. At the other end of the social scale, of course, the really wealthy layer of Egyptian society—the uppermost business elite—also took no part in the movement. These people, the principal beneficiaries of the regime, were naturally behind Mubarak, and had their jet engines idling, ready to flee if necessary.

*But are those who come from the ashwa'iyyat so homogeneous? It is estimated they make up a fifth of the total population, after all. Do sociological studies not show that they include quite a few educated young, or not so young, people who cannot afford to live in the centre of the city, but are not destitute slum-dwellers?*

Yes, those who live in the peripheries of the big cities are composed of at least two distinct groups, which by and large correspond to different neighbourhoods. On the one hand are people who can no longer afford to live in the city proper, and move out to what are in fact historic neighbourhoods, which in the case of Cairo have been there since at least the eighteenth century, but have deteriorated really badly in the last thirty years or so. They still have strong social networks and are quite politicized, but are terribly run down because of state neglect. On the other hand, you have the shanty towns proper, made of random shacks built in the last ten to fifteen years, with no services or infrastructure at all, crowded with those who are desperately poor, moving in from rural or small-town hinterlands.

*Still, are they really the contemporary equivalent of the classes dangerous to nineteenth-century bourgeois imagination? Those who dwell in the ashwa'iyyat comprise over a quarter of the population of Greater Cairo. How could there be any hope of an Egyptian democracy if they were excluded from political mobilization in advance, as liabilities for any demonstration?*

If you separate out the historic neighbourhoods, the proportion is significantly lower—maybe two to three million people. That being said, if it is to be realistic, a revolutionary politics has to take the existing fears and anxieties of a class society into account. The organization of the uprising sprang into being in a matter of days, and remained tenuous and improvised. There was no way it could have canalized a violent collective explosion from the shanty towns, which would only have helped the dictatorship to batten down the hatches. It would also have been put at risk if there had been any outbreaks of individual criminality or looting, once the police were withdrawn from the streets. So it must be reckoned fortunate that neither of these things occurred. Certainly, the fact that they didn't was also an expression of the tragic isolation of this mass of the poor from normal links to the rest of society. The priority is to re-integrate them back into city life. Most if not all of the

presidential candidates to emerge from the uprising have said that, if elected, the first item of their programme would be to extend public infrastructure and services—decent housing, clean water, schools, policing—into the *ashwa'iyyat*, to restore the peripheries to the cities to which they belong.

*The peasantry was the other major class to all appearances passive during the uprising. Could that have been predicted?*

Conditions in the countryside are the product of a long historical process. In the fifties, when Nasser came to power, peasants made up at least 80 per cent of the population, and he made sure they were never politically mobilized. It is true that he was equally wary of workers, but at least these were concentrated in big cities where he could watch and control them. The peasants were much more numerous and scattered, and could not be dealt with in the same way. His regime proclaimed a land reform, but it did not lead to a redistribution of benefits to the mass of the peasantry. The big landowners were warned there would be a ceiling on their properties, but they were given plenty of time to dispose of holdings above it, either by transferring them to relatives or selling them on the open market. The result was the emergence of a new class of middling landowners, holding between 20–100 *feddans*, built into the party of the regime, which was then the Arab Socialist Union. The peasantry was essentially transferred from the tutelage of the large landowners to that of this stratum. Dependent on these exploiters, they remained alienated from the life of the state.

But their tenancies were protected: they could not be kicked off their plots by landlords raising rents on them. In the early nineties, however, Mubarak passed a law, implemented in 1997, which allowed landlords to do just that. The result was a wave of peasant revolts over the next two years, when tens of thousands of villagers refused eviction, torched crops and attacked their oppressors. The central security forces were sent in, entire villages were razed to the ground and the unrest was contained. Thereafter, little more was heard from the peasantry. If it was difficult for opposition activists to reach the workers, it was even more so to make contact with the peasantry, forcibly still more depoliticized. So it is not surprising that in the three short weeks of the uprising, the rural population—while tacitly welcoming the revolt—played so small a role.

*Are there any significant regional differences in the countryside?*

Historically, Egypt has always been divided into two parts, Lower and Upper, the former stretching from a few kilometres south of the capital down to the Mediterranean, and containing around 85 per cent of the population, the latter extending southwards all the way to Sudan. This southern region, commonly known as the Sa'id, could be seen as an Egyptian version of Sicily, with traditions of family honour, vendettas, mafia-like trafficking in weapons and drugs. Unlike the rest of the country, the rural population tends to be armed, and has its own specific grievances against the regime. Though it has relatively more Copts, the Sa'id bore the brunt of Islamist militancy from the late seventies to the mid-nineties. Also, the state has often sent its toughest governors south to try to bring the region under tighter control, while at the same time investing much less in it than the north, precisely because of its insubordinate character. Few tears will have been shed there over the defenestration of Mubarak.

#### B. THE REGIME

*Mubarak has gone, but the apparatuses on which his dictatorship rested have not vanished. The armed forces currently hold ultimate power, in the shape of the Supreme Military Council. How should the Egyptian military be characterized, and what role is it now likely to play?*

When a regime has come to power through military force, either by coup or conquest, it typically issues into a tripartite structure, with a division of labour between its three component parts, each crystallizing into separate institutions. The first component of this 'power triangle' consists of those who take over daily government through a political apparatus, typically composed of a presidency (or monarchy) and a ruling party. The second component consists of military officers who handle domestic repression through a multilayered security complex, which includes police, intelligence and paramilitary forces. The third group consists of those who return to the barracks and continue to represent the military proper. Over time, each develops different agendas, which observers mistakenly minimize or conflate. For institutions develop their own identities, form their own corporate interests and shape their members in their own image. Thus in the case of Egypt, analysts across the

board tend to speak of Mubarak, Omar Suleiman and Ahmed Shafiq as military figures, because Mubarak was head of the air force thirty-five years ago, Suleiman was an army general over twenty years ago, Shafiq commanded the air force ten years ago. But this sort of classification is illusive. Once they pass into the regime's political or security apparatus, these agents no longer represent the interest of the military as an institution.

By temperament and training the military is not particularly bent on exercising either direct governance or domestic repression. Its interest tends to lie in enhancing its firepower and overall combat readiness, in addition to the economic status of the armed forces as a whole. The officer corps is often content, as in Turkey or Latin America, with setting up a political process in which there are competing parties, and then stepping back to act as the guardian of the system it has just created—intervening only when necessary through warnings or limited 'corrective' coups.

Quite different is the security coterie, an unnatural creature that can thrive only in an authoritarian environment. Should the regime democratize, it becomes completely deflated, its influence diminished. Equally important, its members realize they will be held accountable for the atrocities they committed; compared to the military, the security apparatus is much more implicated in human-rights violations and much less able to guarantee amnesty for its own. When there is a democratic change, the new rulers flinch from antagonizing the military, but do not hesitate to mark security officers for trial. So unlike the military, security organs always push for authoritarian rule to continue.

The political leadership in this system is normally suspended in the middle. It is vulnerable in so far as it has no direct means of repressing the population without the support of the military or the security complex. At the same time, it does not necessarily require a permanent ultra-authoritarian setting; it can still cling to power while offering limited compromises leading to so-called 'semi-' or 'quasi-liberalization'. Because of these varying dispositions and capacities, the three components of this kind of regime both cooperate and compete, their interests both overlapping and diverging all the time, according to domestic or international developments. What complicates the picture even further is that none of these components is monolithic in character; each has its own internal subdivisions and tensions.

*The Egyptian military have embodied this schema?*

Under Nasser, as I have mentioned, the military was originally in charge of domestic repression. But after the Six-Day War in 1967, the political apparatus decided it had had enough of the mood swings in the armed forces, and began the process of isolating the military politically under the pretext of professionalizing it. This process was taken to great lengths by Sadat in the days leading up to the October War of 1973, and in its aftermath. Mubarak pushed it even further in the eighties. The last charismatic leader of the Egyptian military, Field Marshal Abd Al-Halim Abu Ghazala, was removed in 1989. From that point on, the armed forces were politically sterilized.

Today, the total size of the military establishment is somewhere over 450,000. Of these, around 300,000 are conscripts. All Egyptian males are called up for a year if they have a college degree, and for three if they do not, unless they have either a familial (no siblings to look after parents) or medical exemption. Conscripts generally have little to do with combat training—they might end up shooting a rifle a few times, but that is it. They basically perform logistical and ‘office boy’ services: cleaning and mopping, delivering things, buying groceries for officers. The real strength of the military lies in its professional officers and NCOs. Their position within the ruling system, and society at large, is often misunderstood abroad. It is much less privileged than many observers imagine. Politically speaking, under Mubarak the leverage of the military was much less than that of the ruling party and the security agencies. Socially too, the position of army officers depreciated, if we compare it to that of their counterparts in the police, or the NDP. No one thought of them as masters of the country.

Economically, officers were granted some autonomy; they were given control of their own enterprises and a good deal of land, to keep them docile. Sadat and Mubarak understood that if they were going to open up the economy, they could not afford to leave the military at the mercy of market forces; they had to be assured of self-sufficiency. So they were given projects that would provide profits which could fund a decent life for officers: a car, a flat, a vacation house, and so on. But this is no economic empire on the scale the Turkish army has built up, for example. It is a much more modest enterprise. Military facilities are quite shabby compared with what is on offer in the wealthy districts of Cairo. Officers

have not grossly enriched themselves. What you gain in the army or air force pales in comparison to what you can get as a senior police officer or member of the ruling party. Under Mubarak, the Minister of the Interior stashed over \$1 billion in his bank account. The Minister of Defence could not dream of that kind of money.

Strategically, moreover, behind all its modern weaponry the Egyptian military has been suffering an identity crisis. After the October War, Sadat knew that to prevent them from becoming too frustrated, he had to give the armed forces considerable symbolic satisfaction. So he made sure the US provided them with state-of-the-art weapons and training, and the prestige of being the tenth biggest military in the world. But they have come to realize that these things are for display only, and feel completely toothless. They have no ability to project strategic power into any country around them—not only Israel, but also the rest of Egypt's neighbours. After the First Gulf War, there was talk of Egyptian forces becoming part of the Gulf security system—what was referred to as the Damascus Declaration of 1991—but the Americans said no, they would handle that through installing their own bases in Gulf countries. Then there was the question of playing a more active role in stabilizing Gaza or Lebanon. That came to nothing too. But it was the division of Sudan, weeks before the January revolt, which sent shock waves throughout the armed forces. Sudan occupies a central place in Egypt's national security doctrine. The secession of the South threatens Egypt's control over the head-waters of the Nile. But again the military was told that this is an area of American influence. So there was now a widespread feeling among officers that to enlist in the army is to build roads, run fisheries, or anything else other than play the role of soldiers. The first captain to fraternize with demonstrators in the Square started complaining about this. What have we actually been doing? What is our mission? What have we done in Gaza or Sudan?

The evidence of this malaise could be seen after Mubarak was gone. For more than thirty years, since the fall of the Shah, the regime never allowed vessels from Iran, whether civilian or military, to pass through the Suez Canal. Within a month of Mubarak's departure, the Egyptian military gave passage to two Iranian warships bound for Syria, refusing to comply with demands from the US and Israel that they be blocked, or at the very least searched. The military has no intention of burning its bridges with either country. They were just sending a message that they

would decide what is in the national interest, as the Turkish military does, for example. Further steps were taken in that direction when the Supreme Military Council sent the new director of General Intelligence to Syria and Qatar in mid-March to discuss ways of enhancing strategic relations. Of course Syria and Qatar, in concert with Turkey and Iran, are part of a new regional power bloc that is trying to secure relative autonomy from the Western agenda, without necessarily antagonizing any of the key Western powers.

In all this, there is no sign—as yet—of any serious divisions within the Egyptian military apparatus. Had there been real fractures between the upper and lower ranks of the army during the popular revolt, we would have seen some evidence of that—the lower ranks, for example, defying orders to end the demonstrations. Or we would have seen dozens of soldiers and junior officers breaking ranks and joining the demonstrations—the kind of wide-scale fraternizing that happened during the Iranian Revolution, for instance. We did not see any of that in Egypt. So far the military has been speaking with a unified voice, across services and across ranks.

*Under Mubarak, how did the political and military apparatuses connect within the regime?*

From 1967 onwards the President has been Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. He appoints the Minister of Defence, the heads of all the services, and the general staff. He also has directly under him the Republican Guard, which the press calls the Presidential Guard, which forms a fifth service alongside the Army, Navy, Air Force and Air Defence. The Guard remained quite small for a decade and a half after its creation in 1953, numbering no more than a few hundred. When Nasser began to marginalize the military politically, following its defeat in 1967, he raised this elite corps to battalion strength; Sadat then expanded it to a brigade of around 15–30,000 troops—the numbers are not certain—equipped with heavy armour. Unlike other military units, the Guard is not stationed in barracks outside the city, but around the various Presidential palaces, and its commander has always been picked for special loyalty to the ruler. On February 11, demonstrators feared that Mubarak would mobilize the Guard to quench the revolt. But in the end it sided with the rest of the military, not the President.



*How do the security forces compare with the regular army?*

When Nasser first came to power he charged one of his closest associates, Zakaria Mohieddin, with developing the Special Section of the Ministry of the Interior, created by the British, into a renamed General Investigations Department responsible for surveillance and disruption of any political activity, with the help of the newly created General Intelligence Service. But the Army decided to shoulder the task of regime maintenance. Under its charismatic commander, Field Marshal Amer, Military Intelligence, Military Police and Military Prisons played the leading role in internal security. After the 1967 war, when Nasser sought to cut the Army down to size, Military Intelligence was confined to spying on other countries' militaries; General Intelligence was redirected towards foreign espionage and domestic counterintelligence (against enemy agents in Egypt); while the General Investigations Department was restored to sole control of internal repression.

Then Nasser decided he needed another body to control the streets, and created the Central Security Forces, based like the army on conscription, and on the same scale—300,000 strong. Their job would be to maintain order and protect strategic sites—the TV building, the Ministries, the Parliament, foreign embassies and banks. So now domestic repression had a head and an arm: the head was the General Investigations Department and the arm was the Central Security Forces. Sadat upgraded the former into the State Security Investigations Sector—our own SS—and also beefed up the Central Security Forces. Under Mubarak, total personnel engaged in domestic repression has been estimated at the heroic figure of two million operatives. Of these, however, a million and a half were hired thugs or informers without uniforms or ranks, often people with a criminal record who had cut deals with the authorities; they were neither part of the police corps proper nor of the Central Security forces nor of the SS. So while the overall number is very inflated, the unleashing of so many people with shadowy relations with the police has terrorized citizens.

If you exclude these, you are left with a security apparatus of about 400,000, of which 300,000 are conscripts armed with bludgeons, but led by an elite usually referred to as the Special Forces, which are equipped with armoured vehicles, rubber bullets, water hoses and tear gas for riot control. Then you have about 70,000 police proper, dealing

with drugs, vice, tourism etc. Finally State Security, the most lethal force, has some 3,000 officers. These rely on the latest technologies for detection of political dissent and torture of detainees.

*What about the party organization of the dictatorship, the NDP—cheek by jowl with New Labour, the PS and SPD and the rest of European social-democracy as fellow members of the Socialist International? What kind of structure is it?*

In 1953 Nasser, at that point not yet Prime Minister, decided to form what he called the Liberation Rally: a loose mass movement intended to undermine rather than replace all the other political forces of the time. Five years later he turned that into the National Union, to stage demonstrations in support of the regime, garner the necessary votes if elections and referendums were needed, and generally act as a sounding-board for him in society. He entrusted some of his closest lieutenants with the task of creating this party, which by 1962 had developed into the Arab Socialist Union. Amer had proved impossible to remove as head of the army, and Nasser wanted to supplement his own charisma and popularity with an entrenched political organization as a counterweight to the military. Nominally the aim was mass mobilization, but in practice the ASU simply plugged into the existing power structures in the countryside, where three-quarters of the Egyptian population still lived, co-opting middling landowners, who were economically dominant figures in the villages, to tot up votes from peasants.

In the towns, Nasser had relied on capitalists throughout the fifties, but they held back investment because they did not trust the military. With the wave of nationalizations in 1961 most of these capitalists became part of the state machinery. The most famous example is Osman Ahmed Osman, the construction magnate and richest man in the country. When his company was nationalized he became its CEO, working for the government. Once this layer was incorporated into the bureaucracy, it too became a key component of the Arab Socialist Union. Naturally, there was nothing socialist about it, nor anything to do with mass mobilization. The function of the party was simply to rally the bureaucracy and the workers in the public sector on the one hand, and the peasants on the other, to clientelistic support of the regime.

This was the structure Sadat inherited in the seventies. Towards the end of the decade, he decided to create more of a façade of democracy, allowing

some people with leftist tendencies to form the Tagammu party, others with more liberal tendencies to operate as the Wafd and Liberal parties, as decoration for a system in which the ruling party was reborn as the National Democratic Party in 1978, with exactly the same patronage networks of old. In due course, this was taken over by Mubarak. But by the late nineties, once the economy was opened up and the regime set about trying to attract foreign investment, another facelift was required. Here Gamal Mubarak played a key role. His circle persuaded him that he could change the NDP by sidelining the technocrats who headed it, who had typically enriched themselves with bribes and commissions as middlemen, in favour of real businessmen who were younger, better educated and, most importantly, linked to global capitalist centres. They could infuse the NDP with 'new thinking' to make it more appealing, and at the same time give Gamal a platform for his presidential ambitions.

Mubarak, who wanted to pass the baton on to his son, backed the creation of the Policy Committee which became the new core of the party, at the expense of its traditional patriarchs. One of these, Kamal El-Shazly, famously portrayed in the best-selling novel *The Yacoubian Building*, died a timely death. Another, Safwat El-Sherif, was kicked upstairs as the party's Secretary General. So there were hurt egos in the change, but no real divisions in the party. Old and new guards were in the same boat together, and it was a formidable vessel. Millions held a nominal membership in the NDP, of whom maybe two million were active. If you were a young businessman who wanted to get ahead, or a small trader who did not want to be harassed by the police, you joined the party. So a lot of this membership was accommodation without commitment. But that should not blind us to the fact that many have a good deal to lose if the NDP were to be dissolved.

*You have given a vivid account of the power triangle on which the dictatorship rested. But, of course, there was another decisive power on which it depended, outside the country. The United States was the ultimate guarantor of the regime, from the moment Washington saved Sadat from Israeli encirclement in 1973, when the IDF was about to cut off the Egyptian armies in Sinai and repeat its crushing victory of 1967. The price of that rescue was Camp David and the conversion of Egypt into a pivot of the American strategic system in the Middle East. The popular uprising against Mubarak put the US on red alert, and it is fairly clear that the decision of the military finally to abandon him was taken in consultation with the White House, not to speak of the*

*Pentagon. How would you describe the interface between the different components of the regime and their American patrons?*

From the eighties onwards, three institutions were in regular interaction with the US: foreign intelligence, the military and the presidency. The General Intelligence Service under Omar Suleiman was, of course, after the Mossad the CIA's key partner in the Middle East, working hand in glove with it to manipulate the PLA, throttle Hamas and torture prisoners in the American rendition system. After 9/11, its importance for Langley naturally soared. Suleiman was probably the single most valued Egyptian official in the eyes of Washington. Mubarak could be slow and stubborn. Suleiman was neither, and both the US and Israeli establishments looked to him as the best possible successor as ruler of the country.

On the political side of the regime, from the time of Sadat onwards there was always close contact between the presidencies of the two countries, with many a state visit back and forth, once Egypt had become America's 'staunch regional ally'. Obama made Cairo his first stop in the Middle East, to deliver the speech which won him his Nobel Prize, and Mubarak was being toasted in Washington a couple of months later. Alongside this traditional diplomatic alignment went increasingly close commercial ties. Sadat openly said his best friend was David Rockefeller, from whom he took his ideas about how to shape the Egyptian economy. The president intervened to bring first Chase Manhattan, then Boeing, Westinghouse, GM and other American corporations into Egypt. Before the eighties came to a close, the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt was the strongest business lobby in the country. 'Door-knocking expeditions' in the US became constant. Each President visiting the US would be accompanied by a large entourage of businessmen and officials of the ruling party, who would call on the various lobbies in Washington and then fan out across the country after the President had left, in search of deals and investors. These connexions became much closer when Mubarak formed the businessmen's cabinet under Ahmed Nazif in 2004, which was greeted with enthusiasm on Wall Street. Corporate America stood to gain handsomely from the new neo-liberal team in Cairo, while the new business elite entrenched in the NDP could expect healthy profits from increased US investments and the change in US aid policy mooted at this time. Civilian assistance of between \$850 million and \$1 billion that in the past had always been disbursed to the Egyptian government would now be redirected to the private sector, for

projects at which it is famously more efficient and less corrupt, as every right-thinking economist knows. Naturally, decent US consultancy fees would be involved, and US advisors would be on hand to ensure the right policy conditions were in place—Washington in fact has hundreds of these operating as a kind of collective shadow cabinet in Egypt. So there is a close, mutually profitable interlocking of interests between corporate America and Egyptian big business, which extends into the political establishments of the two countries.

As for the military, it goes without saying that the relations with the Pentagon have been extremely close. Annual flows of over \$1 billion for weapons and training—more than to any armed forces in the world save Israel's—speak for themselves. Whether this has bought unconditional fealty to the United States is another matter. The Pentagon has a vital stake in its relations with the Egyptian military, to preserve strategic control of the Middle East, and no doubt personal ties between the top brass of the two are often quite intimate. But it does not follow that the Egyptian officer corps are therefore playthings of Washington. They have their own outlook on the world, and corporate interests to consider. Once the uprising started this year, it is pretty clear that the message from the Pentagon was: the best-case scenario is for Mubarak to stay on till September and then gracefully step down, or—still better—for Omar Suleiman to take over. It is equally clear the Egyptian military at some point told them that was no longer possible: you have to cut your losses—if you want to avoid chaos, stop an Islamist takeover, prevent any destabilization that could affect Israel, we need to nudge the President out of power. In the end the US assented. So while the military certainly consulted Washington, I think it made a rational decision for its own reasons.

### C. THE FIRST MONTH

*The Supreme Military Council that met on February 10 was the body that took this decision. What is its status, who does it consist of and how does it operate?*

The Council is theoretically convened when the country is at war. So it was called into session in 1967 and 1973, each time chaired by the President as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces—that is, Nasser in the first case and Sadat in the second. So when the Council

convened on February 10 without Mubarak, and a military analyst explained on television that it had met of its own accord, without an invitation of the Commander-in-Chief, or his presence, it was equivalent to a mutiny, announcing that the Mubarak regime was over.

Since then the Council has been in permanent session, meeting in the Defence Ministry. It is composed of the Defence Minister, the Chief of Staff, the heads of the five services, of the five military districts into which the country is divided, and the heads of each of the specialized departments—intelligence, legal and so on. But we can be sure it is the first twelve who call the shots. As far as we can tell, decisions are taken collectively, by consensus. So far the Council has been careful to rotate the members speaking for it to avoid any impression that just two or three people dominate it.

*The Chairman of the Council, Defence Minister Tantawi, is a long-time associate of Mubarak, not long ago contemptuously referred to as his 'poodle' by middle-ranking officers, according to US dispatches revealed by Wikileaks. How would you assess his present role?*

Tantawi was the head of the Republican Guard, protecting the President, before becoming Minister of Defence. As Minister, he wore two hats—one belonging to the military establishment, the other to the political apparatus around the Presidency, even if since the days of Sadat the Defence Minister cannot technically be a member of the NDP. Certainly he is a close associate of Mubarak, but he understood that Mubarak had to be abandoned, and so he took off his political hat and decided to go along with the rest of the military. That being said, Tantawi is now an old man—seventy-five—and it is not clear how much authority he wields in the Supreme Military Council.

*Would it be correct to say that the turning-point since the fall of Mubarak has been the eviction of the Prime Minister, Ahmed Shafiq, another intimate, whom he appointed to put down the uprising, and whose removal the Supreme Military Council was forced to accept—it was certainly not its own initiative—on March 3?*

Shafiq was an air-force general who proudly declared that Mubarak taught him flying, and many other skills. Mubarak made him commander of the air force, and they have always been close friends—many people,

indeed, say they are related by marriage. After retirement, Mubarak appointed him Minister of Civil Aviation, a position in which huge profits were to be made, with a big new international airport, renovation of the Egyptian national airline, and so forth. So he had been a civilian politician adorning the ruling party for nearly a decade when he was appointed Prime Minister. His performance was miserable. He mocked the demonstrators, calling Tahrir Square an imitation Hyde Park Corner, saying people there should be given candy and chocolates. Instead there came the brutal assault by police thugs on February 2. His promise of swift justice came to nothing, and he famously insulted reporters who asked him inconvenient questions. After flatly declaring that Mubarak would never step down, he then hailed the ‘great revolution’ of January 25. Meanwhile, it was widely reported that Shafiq was still in touch with Mubarak in his luxury hide-out in Sharm el-Sheikh.

On March 2, Shafiq appeared as Prime Minister on a talk show with Naguib Sawiris, the Coptic telecommunications millionaire and liberal patron of the arts, a sort of Egyptian George Soros, the popular broadcaster Hamdi Kandil (no relation), and the novelist Alaa Al-Aswany, author of *The Yacoubian Building*. There he was publicly taken to task for the assault on the Square on February 2, and his failure to bring anyone to account for the deaths and injuries incurred at the hands of the police during the uprising (which latest reports estimate at 685 dead and over 5,000 injured). Al-Aswany asked him how on earth Mahmoud Wagdy, his new Interior Minister—first appointed during the revolt, and reappointed by Shafiq after Mubarak’s departure—could still be claiming that it was foreign snipers who had killed people and that the police had done a superb job. Losing his temper, Shafiq shouted back ‘Don’t you don the veil of patriotism when speaking to me!’ Kandil bluntly told him he had no shame continuing in his post when it was perfectly clear the people rejected him. Within twenty-four hours of this exchange before the whole nation, he was out.

*This extraordinary episode raises the more general question of the role of the different media—television, the press, radio and social networks—before, during and after the uprising. Could you say something about that?*

For forty years, the media were all controlled by the state, under what Nasser first called the Ministry of National Guidance and later Sadat the Ministry of Information. But in the nineties, out of the confidence I

have described that no serious opposition remained, Mubarak allowed independent media to appear—a certain number of newspapers, satellite television channels, and a very strong independent cinema—that openly criticized the President, his family and the state of the country. There were only a few red lines that could not be crossed. Foreigners are often surprised that a movie like *The Yacoubian Building* could be made in Egypt, but there were many other films no less critical of the regime, some of them more so. How was all this possible? In good measure, the attitude of the regime was that if there is no organized opposition, all this would be just talk. It could even be useful as a safety valve: if you allow people to let off steam once in a while, that might be better for the system. But history was also important. The first Egyptian films appeared already in the 1920s. Egyptian television, which started in 1960, was the first in the Arab world. There was a long cultural tradition in the country, not to be compared with anything in the Gulf, for instance. So it was difficult to keep the new technologies of satellite broadcasting and the internet bottled up. The regime decided it was more prudent to permit expression within certain negotiated limits.

Politically, television talk shows became the most important form in the new landscape. These go out at night on the independent satellite channels, with very high-profile anchors, and last two to three hours, sometimes even longer, discussing and arguing about everything that has happened during the day. There are four or five of these, to which Egyptians have been glued every evening to get a general idea of the state of the country. Towards the end, of course, the regime started to target some of them, banning certain shows and tempering others. But they were never shut down completely, and thus played a key role during the revolt, and continued to do so afterwards. Abroad, the impression is widespread that Facebook was the leading medium in the uprising, and it was certainly critical for the younger generation in the first few days of the protests. But for most ordinary Egyptians, the talk shows were much more widely accessible. Once the uprising was under way, they would invite the demonstrators to come onto the shows, they would interview policemen, reporters, businessmen, serving as an open forum for discussion. The effect was very powerful.

Once Mubarak was ousted, the military finally yielded to popular demands, and the Ministry of Information was abolished. Overnight, the state media changed their tune with comical speed, and started denouncing the



former President and his family, and singing the praises of the movement that overthrew him. But they have zero credibility. It is the independent talk shows that hold public attention. The organizers of the youth groups have been welcomed on them, members of the committee to amend the constitution explained its work on them, representatives of the Supreme Military Council appeared on a four-hour show, fielding calls from viewers about what they were doing, the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition groups were also featured; in short, all the players in the unfolding political drama. People not only watch these programmes to feel the pulse of what is happening in the country, they become political events in themselves, as in the recent episode with Shafiq.

*What then of the cabinet that has replaced Shafiq's—what is its character?*

The new Prime Minister, Essam Sharaf, is an engineer who holds a chair at Cairo University. He was briefly Minister of Transport in the Nazif government of 2004, but resigned after conflicts with it. During the uprising, he came to the Square and expressed his solidarity with its occupiers, which is why he was one of the names proposed by the demonstrators to the Supreme Military Council to head the government. Of the three most important Ministries, the portfolio of Foreign Affairs has gone to Nabil El-Araby, a diplomat who accompanied Sadat to Camp David and dissented from his deal with Begin, and then made a career on various UN commissions and the International Court of Justice. The Minister of the Interior, Mansour Al-Essawi, is a police general from one of the southernmost parts of the Sa'id, known for his efforts to fight corruption, who was living on and off in Paris, alienated from the regime. He has already dissolved the SS. The Minister of Justice, Mohamed Abdelaziz El-Guindy, is an independent-minded judge, formerly Attorney-General; the Ministry is politically critical, since it is in charge of electoral supervision. Two other significant figures are Samir Radwan at the Treasury and Gouda Abdel-Khaleq at Social Welfare, both professors of economics with clear leftist tendencies—in fact Abdel-Khaleq is a member of Tagammu, the licensed Communist Party.

*So they belong to the tradition that collaborated with Mubarak?*

When the Free Officers took power in 1952, there were three communist organizations in Egypt: the Egyptian Communist Party, the Workers' Vanguard Party and the Democratic Movement for National Liberation.

The latter attached itself to Nasser from the beginning, but the other two did not and were repressed by him. Eventually, in the sixties, he released their members from prison on condition that the whole communist movement dissolve itself and join the Arab Socialist Union. His plan was to co-opt its intellectual elite, using them for his purposes in official positions, and get rid of the rank and file completely. This continued until the seventies when Sadat called on the one veteran of the Free Officers who had always been close to the communists, Khaled Mohieddin, who had been purged by Nasser in 54, to set up a party that would bring together what remained of this tradition, as a minor loyal opposition to the NDP. So Mohieddin formed the National Progressive Unionist Party, or Tagammu, as a respectable shelter for left intellectuals of this descent. In 2003, Mohieddin stepped down, and the party's new leader, Refaat El-Saeed, came to terms with Mubarak on the pretext that Islamism was the common enemy of both. So throughout the nineties, and the first decade of this century, Egyptian communism was completely aligned with the government. But what is left of it still contains intellectuals of some professional competence, of whom the pair now holding cabinet posts are good examples.

*Why have the detested emergency laws not already been lifted, now that Mubarak has gone?*

The military promise that they will be rescinded once a new President and Parliament are in place. However, the truth is that these laws have been on the books almost continuously since 1948. The emergency laws are in a sense a formality, the symbol of a state of affairs more than of the state itself. The real problem is the culture of the police: the law, emergency or otherwise, does not exist for them. They have come to assume they can do anything they want—tap your phone, search your house, put you in jail, beat you up. The day after the emergency laws are rescinded you can still have a police officer who has been on the street for twenty years and does not understand why he needs a court order to tap the phone of someone he suspects is dealing drugs, or why a suspect who does not want to talk cannot be slapped around and electrocuted. He does these things because that is the only way to do business he knows.

Popular anger at this daily oppression runs very deep. An incident a few weeks ago in Maadi, a very upscale part of Cairo, can give you an idea of

the tensions it creates. A young police officer got into a traffic dispute with a bus driver. Becoming annoyed, he pulled out his gun and shot the citizen in the arm. Instead of turning away, on this occasion onlookers were so infuriated they attacked him and beat him almost to death. This is the kind of thing that is all too likely to happen, so long as this culture of arbitrary police violence persists. The emergency laws need to be abolished, but it is the empowerment of ordinary people that will do most to change it.

*In Tunisia the ruling party has been declared illegal. In some respects, Ben Ali's dictatorship was even more repressive than Mubarak's, but as a ruling party the NDP was much like the Neo-Destour. What are its prospects now?*

Banning the ruling party would remain largely a symbolic act, because as long as there is no radical change in the socio-economic landscape, the forces ensconced within it will eventually regroup in a different body. But it is true that if the party were dissolved now, or its leaders forbidden to run in the next election, but allowed to regroup in four years or so, you would be likely to have an organization that was more thoroughly reformed at the end of the process. But in all probability it would retain considerable electoral strength, preserving strong clientelistic networks, and remain a key economic and political player.

*If it was stripped of its assets?*

The NDP does not own many assets in its name directly. What it possesses are two important bases. One is its grip on the bureaucracy, which amounts to six million people, who have been its ready supporters and voters, whose budget has allowed a steady flow into its coffers, and whose services have always been at its disposal. That will be removed from the party. Its other base will not dwindle so easily, since it comprises private-sector businessmen and wealthy landowners who have their own assets, which they used both to support the party and to gain from it, making sure of a return on their investments. Short of confiscations of their wealth, they will have the wherewithal for a comeback. The critical point will be subtraction of the bureaucracy from the NDP. How far that will go remains to be seen. The party possesses a lot of informal networks that it developed over time. To what extent can these be disrupted?

*When elections are called, the ruling party is likely to put up a pretty strong performance?*

If it is allowed to run for election this year, it will certainly do so. Optimists estimate that a third of the seats might go to the NDP, a third to the Muslim Brotherhood and a third allocated among all the others. A more pessimistic view is that the NDP and the Brotherhood will divide 80 per cent of the electorate between them. Even on the most optimistic view, if the NDP were banned, people running as independents but actually representing the old order would probably make up a third of the Parliament or more. The forces that actually brought down the dictatorship will constitute a minority in the assembly.

*Whatever form the constitution takes, it looks as if the President will have very extensive powers. Is it possible to make any kind of guess as to who is likely to gain the position?*

He will certainly not be anyone too obviously connected with the ruling party. So far, a few candidates have emerged. One is Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the Arab League, somewhat marginalized by the regime in recent years, but for a decade Mubarak's Foreign Minister. El-Baradei is another leading contender, much less associated with the dictatorship. Also in the field is senior judge Hisham Al-Bastaweissy, a staunch critic of the regime, and a long-time advocate of judicial independence. Some talk of Mohamed Abdul Salam Mahgoub, a colonel from military intelligence regarded as a very successful governor of Alexandria, where he became so popular he was promoted to head the unimportant Ministry of Local Development. So he is not seen as coming from the top cohort of the ruling party. The Muslim Brotherhood have said they will not run a candidate, but whoever they support will have a solid vote-bank.

*What political direction might the Muslim Brotherhood take, now that it is overground?*

We are at a point where all major actors are redefining themselves, in a completely new situation. There are many reasons for the Brotherhood to prove weaker than it was before. Most importantly, it drew its main strength from the fact that it raised the banner of opposition to the brutally authoritarian regime, and many of its militants were tortured or

died in prison. But in even a limited sort of democracy, there is no need for martyrs any longer. The other great strength of the Muslim Brothers was that in a very corrupt system that provided little or nothing to the poor, their welfare services offered real material assistance and solidarity. But that appeal too will decline if you have a government that is for the first time responsive to people's needs.

Then too there has long been a conflict within the Brotherhood between the old guard and a new guard. The old guard are people who have spent most of their life in prison. Their main claim to authority is that they know how to work in the shadows, sustaining an underground movement, and young idealistic reformers do not. But once political work moves above ground, this stock argument fails. In the absence of mortal danger, it is no longer credible to maintain that you will ruin everything if you leave the party. The Muslim Brotherhood can emerge as an important actor but not as the organization we have known until now. It would have to become another kind of party, with a vaguer Islamic identity, perhaps like the AKP in Turkey.

*What about the January 25 Coalition and the array of forces that sprang from the uprising?*

There was a heterogeneous front, and there is no sign yet that it is capable of consolidating into a single political party. If it were to do so, the critical weight in it would be liberal. But these liberals would find it difficult to work together with leftists and Islamists. So more likely, we will have a majority organization that is very liberal, with smaller leftist and reformist Islamic groups alongside it. That is where developments seem to be heading now, dispersing the potential of the movement. The hope that they could rise above their differences to form one truly radical party looks unrealistic. They differ on too many basic issues. In co-operation, they might be able to carry a third of the vote, but that is a best-case scenario.

*Who are the liberals in today's Egypt, and what is their outlook?*

Those gathered around Mohamed El-Baradei and the party he is most closely associated with, the Democratic Front, can fairly be described as liberals, as can those who orchestrated the appeals on Facebook at the start of the uprising. So too supporters of Ayman Nour and the El-Ghad

party he created before he went to prison. Many of the organizers in this area of opinion come from the historic Wafd, the party of liberal nationalism under the monarchy, which seems to be making a comeback. In the media and the intelligentsia—actually in the culture at large—there is now a great nostalgia for the time when the Wafd was the leading political force in the country. In the past five or six years, a sort of fixation on the Egypt of the twenties, thirties and forties has developed, an idealization of the period as a liberal utopia that has become very widespread in novels and movies. Al-Aswany is a prime example. One of the advantages the Islamists possessed lay in the captivating image of the Prophet and his life in Medina—another kind of utopia to return to. Now it is the golden age of the 1920s that has taken hold of the Egyptian imagination. All the Presidential candidates are evoking this image of a better, more open and cosmopolitan past.

#### D. PROSPECTS

*How is the referendum on amendments to the constitution to be assessed?*

The Supreme Military Council created a committee to propose constitutional amendments, headed by a jurist and historian with Islamist sympathies, Tareq El-Bishri, and including a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. The choice of El-Bishri is quite significant. Not only is he generally considered one of Egypt's foremost intellectuals, but his main historical treatise, which examines Egyptian politics between the end of the Second World War and the coup that took place seven years later, is framed by the following question: how did it come about that the vibrant street politics of the late 1940s and early 1950s, pregnant as it was with revolutionary movements and alternatives, produced no seizure of power, allowing the military to step in instead? In other words, one of El-Bishri's primary obsessions is how the military rode the crest of radical protests in 1952 and stole the revolution. Every interview he has given since his appointment by the Supreme Military Council has reflected his determination not to let this happen again.

The committee drafted a set of changes that scrap the dictatorship's restrictions on Presidential candidates; reduce the Presidency from five to four years, allowing a maximum of two terms; and limit the

President's power to declare a state of emergency to six months, renewable only by referendum. At military insistence, these were put at virtually point-blank notice to voters on March 19. The NDP and Islamists, spearheaded by the Muslim Brothers and Salafis (puritanical Muslims), called for approval of the package. The Youth Coalition of the January 25 Revolution, El-Baradei and other presidential candidates, in addition to liberal and leftist forces, opposed it, asking why the constitution fabricated by the dictatorship should be amended, rather than a new constitution democratically decided. The proposed package requires a Constituent Assembly to be nominated by a Parliament elected also at short notice—this autumn—to write a new constitution. Those who supported the procedure of the plebiscite argued that it minimizes the danger of the military entrenching themselves in power (in keeping with the logic of El-Bishri's concern). Those who rejected it argued that the rush to a plebiscite of such narrow scope was calculated to ensure that the two longest-established organizations, the NDP and the Brotherhood—each in their way thoroughly conservative, and least likely to upset the High Command—would capture the aftermath of the regime.

*The turnout was 41 per cent. By what kind of yardstick should this be judged?*

By Egyptian standards, it is a fairly high figure. The population of the country is now close to 85 million, of whom 45 million have the right to vote, and 18 million did so. This sounds like a low turnout, compared with official figures for various referendums and elections held under the old regime. But these were always fraudulent. It was easy to tell that because you never actually saw people casting their votes in significant numbers. It was completely different this time. In Cairo, every single voting station was completely packed, with long lines from 7 in the morning until 8 or 9 at night. Of course, as you would expect, turnout was highest in the big cities, and much lower in the countryside. Technically, nearly 60 per cent of the population is still classified as rural, even if in practice most people now live in villages the size of small towns; today the peasantry proper is only about a quarter of the labour force. There are no registration problems, since everyone is now issued with a magnetic ID, and turnout will probably be much higher in the elections for parliament.

*How should the overwhelming vote in favour of the constitutional amendments—77 per cent—be interpreted?*

This is now much discussed. What seems clear is that a Yes vote meant different things to different people. A great many voted for the amendments in the belief that approval was needed to get the country running again. This was probably the dominant reason for the size of the Yes vote—a fear that to vote No would be to prolong chaos and uncertainty, preventing any return to life as normal. One could often hear people saying they were going to vote Yes because they wanted to get back to work, and to see the economy start picking up; it was very difficult for them to understand that this had nothing to do with voting Yes or No. Another major factor was the belief, equally mistaken, that a Yes vote was necessary to preserve Article Two of the constitution, which declares the principles of *sharia* to be the basis of legislation—that a No vote meant abolition of the existing constitution. In fact a new constitution is going to be framed anyway, regardless of the result of the referendum. The common people essentially voted Yes for these reasons. They were deluded, but comprehensibly so. Three organized factions, of course, urged them on: the remnants of the NDP, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi fundamentalists—the latter two playing particularly on the second fear.

*When does Article Two of the constitution date from?*

Actually, though few people are aware of this, its history goes back to the first Egyptian constitution of 1923, which included an article stating that the *sharia* was one of the main sources of legislation. There was a similar article in the 1954 constitution, drafted after the Free Officers came to power, and it was reintroduced in the charters of 1964 and 1971. Then in 1980 Sadat proposed two amendments to the constitution. The first upgraded the *sharia* from being just one of the main sources of legislation to become *the* main source, and the second allowed the President to be re-elected indefinitely—his real objective. The first was designed as a cover for the second, in a package deal formally submitted to a referendum. After its passage Sadat set up a committee that was supposed to ensure that all laws were in line with the *sharia*. It met for five months without reaching any conclusion, and was never heard of again.



*The No vote was concentrated in Cairo, where it reached 39.48 per cent, Alexandria at 32.87 and Giza at 31.82 per cent. How should these results be assessed?*

Given the strength of the desire for a return to normalcy and attachments to religion in popular consciousness, the size of the No vote in Cairo—almost two-fifths of those who voted—was impressive. The campaign to reject the package of amendments was led by the liberals and leftists who were at the forefront of the uprising. In terms of political organization, these are still quite small groups. What the No vote in Cairo—of which Giza is practically an extension—and Alexandria showed is the considerable social base these forces could potentially enjoy in a democratic Egypt, principally in the educated middle class, but also among urban workers. It is a tribute to the political authority they have gained in leading the uprising that so many voters followed their advice in a referendum held at such short notice, and amid so much confusion about its meaning. But if this still-potential vanguard role does not speedily acquire organizational form, memories of Tahrir are likely to fade away. So far there are very few signs of such organization. Most non-Islamist activists are still engrossed in the same casuistic debates that preceded the revolt. Although the practical lifting of censorship now offers them an expanded public platform, too often they seem still to be splitting hairs as if nothing has changed.

*A couple of other, non-metropolitan, zones registered No votes well above the national average—the Red Sea and South Sinai governorates, at 36.62 and 33.06 per cent. What explains these scores?*

Probably fear of Islamism. These are areas where the livelihood of the population depends on tourism, which they suspect might suffer if restrictions on alcohol or swim-gear come into force. When they see which way religious groups are going, they tend to vote the opposite.

*What is the effective upshot of the referendum?*

The official position of the armed forces is that they don't want a new constitution to be drafted under military rule—it should be written in a democratic atmosphere. So after the referendum the agenda is supposed to go like this. First, there will be parliamentary elections, probably in

September, followed by presidential elections in December or early January. The Parliament will be required to appoint a Constituent Assembly within six months, which will then have another six months to draft a constitution. Once completed, the new constitution will be submitted to a referendum within fifteen days. The campaigners for a No vote have argued that in this scenario Parliament is likely to be controlled by remnants of the NDP and the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Constituent Assembly will reflect that balance. The military's reply has been that if a Constituent Assembly were elected right away, it would probably produce the same balance of forces as a Parliament in September, so there should be no objection to the latter.

*The Youth Revolution Coalition has formally demanded the dissolution of the ruling party. Has that been taken up by anyone else as a demand?*

Yes, this is a big issue at the moment. But it's not yet clear what the fate of the NDP will be. The pattern so far has been that the Supreme Military Council is unresponsive to popular demands at the start, and then suddenly acts on them later. This was the case with the dismissal of the Shafiq government, the abolition of the SS, and before that of the Ministry of Information. So we'll have to see. Certainly, there is a very general hope that at least the leading members of the ruling party will be excluded from participation in the next elections. The military says it will be announcing the rules for the formation of parties and holding of elections shortly.

*How have the media evolved since the overthrow of Mubarak?*

This is another key issue. Along with the call for a dissolution or neutralization of the ruling party, there have been widespread demands for a purge of those in charge of the state media. This is not just because people have been irritated by the ludicrous spectacle of notorious mouthpieces of the dictatorship suddenly presenting themselves as champions of the revolution. It is also because the state media have continued to play a double game by whipping up every kind of scare as a threat to the great achievements of the revolution, trying to sow panic that would favour a restoration of the old order. After demonstrations strongly demanding the removal of the leaders of the TV stations and newspapers controlled by the state, on 2 April the prime minister issued two decrees purging close to a dozen such figures.

*What about developments on the industrial front?*

Very contradictory. There is still rather little pressure coming from below. Most workers are still essentially concerned with their daily needs—pay, holidays, working conditions—with very few overarching political demands so far. On the other hand, there is a kind of politicization from above, as the new Minister of Labour, Ahmed Hassan El-Borai—a jurist specializing in labour relations, who has long been sympathetic to workers and is much respected by them—promises that within six months there will be a new statute for labour, with a guaranteed minimum wage and the right of workers to organize independent trade unions and a national federation of labour. Yet at the same time the new government has drafted a law criminalizing strikes, protests, demonstrations and sit-ins that interrupt private or state-owned businesses or affect the economy, as long as the emergency laws remain in force. Naturally, this attempt at repression is meeting with vehement opposition from independent trade unions, not to speak of left and liberal groups at large.

*Meanwhile, what has been happening among the liberal and left groups that powered the uprising? Is the landscape there still pretty much the same, or has it altered?*

Unfortunately, little has changed. Two major issues divide this area of opinion. One is the question of organization. Should the different groups that led the rising retain their identities, should they regroup behind one of the existing forces, or should they create a new organization of some kind? There were negotiations to see if the Democratic Front—one of the various liberal parties formed in the last years of Mubarak—could be recast to bring various trends together, but its older members resisted what they saw as an attempt to hijack it by youngsters, who were not yet even party members. Others have insisted on the need to create a new party, but that has yet to see the light of day, partly because of differences over the attitude it should take toward religion.

This is now the other big issue confronting the No camp, in the wake of the referendum. Liberal and leftist intellectuals have long advocated a thoroughgoing secularization of Egyptian culture, seeking to convince people to relegate religion to the private sphere, or at least to cast it aside when they take political decisions. Since the revolution, many have felt

they now possess the moral authority to press this case home. The referendum, however, has shown the risks of this approach. It antagonizes many ordinary people who categorically reject state secularization, and will instinctively shut down if it is made a central demand, and not listen to anything else that is put to them. So others argue that it is a condition of any realistic politics to make it clear that the place of Islam in Egypt has been and will remain respected. On both scores, organization and religion, the liberal–left front is still in some disarray.

*How do the assorted Islamist forces themselves stack up?*

This is a complicated story. Roughly speaking, there are three main sectors. The Muslim Brotherhood, which is the oldest and largest, appears to have the wind in its sails after its part in the victory of the Yes camp in the referendum. But it also risks splintering as it enters the political arena proper. There is the centrist Wasat party, which broke away from the Brotherhood over ten years ago (though it has only just been licensed), and is now drawing a lot of people away from the Brotherhood as a more moderate Islamic alternative. When the revolution came, the party had only about seventy members. In the first weeks of March, 30,000 mostly young people, disillusioned with the Brotherhood, applied to join it. At the same time, the youth within the Brotherhood who rallied to its reformist wing are threatening to set up a new party of their own—Nahda, or Renaissance—unless all the existing leaders of the Brotherhood resign from their positions to allow transparent democratic elections within the organization, with independent observers.

A second sector is composed of militant fundamentalists, or political Salafists. Here there were two major groups—Al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya, and Al-Jihad—in addition to several smaller ones. These groups chose the path of armed struggle against the dictatorship because they saw no prospects for peaceful change. It was a unit from the Jihad which finished off Sadat. In the repression that followed his assassination, the original leadership of the Jihad was rounded up and put away. Those who got away, notably Ayman Al-Zawahiri, decided that the Western-backed regime was too strong to take on, and so shifted their campaign from the ‘near enemy’ (the authoritarian regime) to the ‘far enemy’ (the regime’s Western allies) via global militant organizations, such as Al-Qaeda. Breakaway groups, whose strength was based mainly on new

recruits from the south of the country and poor urban neighbourhoods, led the low-intensity insurgency in the 1990s.

Five years ago, both groups of Salafists in prison made a deal with the regime that if they wrote treatises explaining in detail why they had misinterpreted the scriptures in taking the road of violence and why they believe they need to renounce violence, they would be released. Four weighty volumes of theological rectification duly appeared, showing how and why they had gone astray, and in 2006 they were sprung from jail. They now want to form a party of their own, arguing that the Muslim Brotherhood is too lax in its religious beliefs, and too prone to compromise in its politics: needed instead is a party of more integrity, stating its positions clearly and sticking to them. Both traditions in this Salafist bloc, the Gamaa al-Islamiyya and the Jihad, insist that they now reject violence and seek only to persuade others to adhere to Islamic texts in a stricter fashion. But there are serious frictions between them, and attempts so far to bring them together have been fruitless. Originally, they maintained that democracy violates Islam, and wanted to abolish the constitution, parliament and elections, aiming to unite all Muslims to recreate the Caliphate once more. Now their real leader, Abboud Al-Zumar—once a colonel in military intelligence, and the mastermind behind Sadat's assassination, who was imprisoned for thirty years—has been in the news for declaring that they will accept democracy, and respect Egypt's international obligations. Not everyone was convinced by this conversion, but a Salafist party would probably get a very small vote anyway.

Finally, there is a basically apolitical fundamentalism. These are puritans who stick to the letter of religious texts, with a minimum of interpretation, and spend most of their time and energy on strict observance of rules. Not unlike orthodox Jews, they care about what they eat, what they drink, what they wear, how they act. Typically, they advocate respect for those in power and try to work peacefully for the moral regeneration of society. They are quite introverted and have usually been very passive politically. Of course, they warn against the dangers of Shi'ism, and complain that not enough is done to undermine Sufi orders, as these contravene their religious beliefs. But mostly they campaign only against what they consider trespasses of morality, agitating for bans on a book or a song or a film which they judge immoral. They are not good timber for the construction of a political movement.

*So secular or Coptic opinion has little to fear from the configuration of Islamist forces in Egypt?*

The day after the referendum, the rector of Al-Azhar University, Ahmed Al-Tayeb, sent a three-part proposal to the government, intended to reclaim its autonomy from the state, lost in 1961, by recovering its control of *waqf* land and mosques, reintegrating *fatwa* specialists in the university, and changing the rector from a government appointee to an elected scholar, chosen by senior clerics. The effect would be to guarantee the independence of Al-Azhar and re-empower it as the centre of authority in matters of religion. Since its tradition is moderate, this would tend to undercut radical interpretations of scripture, and reassure those who fear that concessions to Islam would make them potential hostages to strict textualism.

*The rector making these proposals is a Mubarak appointee?*

That's true. But he is a polished Islamic scholar with a doctorate from the Sorbonne, who resigned from the ruling party when he was appointed, so he has a good deal of support. Under his proposal, the next rector will once again, as in the past, be chosen by a committee of scholars from all over the Islamic world, not just from Egypt. In the early twentieth century, we had a Tunisian rector.

*How much attention is now being paid, amidst the dramatic political and social process unfolding in Egypt, by the media and public opinion to events in the rest of the Arab world?*

A high level of attention. The effect on Egyptians of the upheavals around them has been twofold. On the one hand, as they watch the unleashing of military violence in Yemen, in Bahrain, in Libya, in Syria, in Jordan, and the tragic results in each, they have had more and more reason to be grateful to the army in Egypt, seeing what happens when tanks and bullets are used against the demonstrators. On the other, they can see that what they are living through is part of a vaster historical process that is convulsing the region. That gives them a certain feeling of security. If Egypt were isolated in its revolution, the prospects of a come-back by elements of the old system and its apparatus of repression would be higher. But these hold-outs are now bound to look around them, and see how unlikely this would be to work any more, as a huge historical wave

engulfs the world they once ruled. So Egyptians feel safer, in the conviction that their gains are not going to be lost, and that time is not going to turn back to the days before January 25th.

*Is it possible to make any prediction as to the outcome of Mubarak's overthrow?*

The two changes that can be expected to set in follow from what has happened already. The unleashing of police brutality on citizens will be checked, and unbounded economic exploitation of the weak will be constrained, now that people can stand up and fight, can demonstrate and strike for their rights. To what extent are we going to have a real democracy? I am pretty sure it will be more democratic than it was before, but it is unlikely to be perfectly democratic. Two scenarios are possible. We might see a government willing to amnesty large numbers of ruling party members and police officers, allowing them to regroup in some other guise, with a general agreement that the top figures of the previous regime will be held responsible for its misdeeds, but the others can return to the fray. Most of the population will return to passivity, patron–client networks will persist, and the police will continue to be overweening and overpaid. If, on the other hand, radical fervour were to escalate, and the government were to tell its ministers to clean out the minions of the old order, they would feel cornered and would not go down without a fight, paving the way either for an authoritarian backlash or a more reformed political order.

So the outcome will really depend on how strong the revolutionary tide is in Egypt. If the movement remains as it is now, moderate and pragmatic, we will have a much better Egypt than existed before, not a perfect democracy. If the movement gains strength and momentum, there is no telling what might happen. For there is no revolutionary movement with the capacity to take over control of all the institutions that need to be purged. Nasser had the army—he could send soldiers out to enforce his agrarian reform, or to run factories, or to become undersecretaries in the bureaucracy. In Russia or China, there were political cadres to carry out these tasks. But so long as there is no revolutionary movement to fill the void, cornering opponents without possessing an organization to take them out freezes the revolt into a position of simply demanding, and then hoping for the best.

*4 April 2011*