

A stylized world map composed of a grid of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to indicate specific geographical locations.

# Egypt's Regional Security Policy after the January 25 Revolution

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- After the ousting of the regime of President Mubarak, Egypt's position in the region is at a crossroads facing several security challenges from neighboring countries such as Israel, Turkey and Iran, but also from its own domestic socio-economic and political dynamics.
- Depending on the answers given to these challenges, the outcome will be a cooperative and peaceful Middle East, a disintegrative and conflictive Middle East, or an explosive and intolerable status quo.
- Despite all odds, cooperative and integrative scenarios, based on negotiations and compromises would be more beneficial to the new generations in all regional parties. What is needed at this moment is a regional initiative toward this goal.

## 1. Background

There is no doubt that the inauguration of Mohamed Morsi, Professor of Engineering at Zagazig University, as the first civilian President of Egypt represents a breakdown of the military regime which ruled Egypt since the 1952 Revolution. Nasser and his military commanders changed the political system in Egypt from parliamentary system to authoritarian system of government. They based their authority on an oppressive state apparatus as well as a garrison state, i.e. a state where security forces are superior over laws. They prohibited political parties, political liberties and human rights though they elevated a sense of social justice. They introduced instead a single party system based on networks, nepotism and trust over efficiency. This led, in the last decade of the ousted Mubarak's reign to a total marginalization of Egyptians and an economic deprivation where the poor reached 42% of the population out of which almost 20% suffer from extreme/absolute poverty. Illiteracy rate, in spite of long term national goal of eliminating it, reached 37% and more among females. These and other factors led to the January 25 Revolution which called for Freedom, Social Justice and Dignity. This requires a drastic transition from the authoritarian regime to a truly democratic one.

In analyzing the role of domestic dynamics on foreign policymaking and implementation, there was a debate among scholars on the frequency and intensity of interactions between the two dimensions. In the 50s and 60s, there was a trend to separate/delink one from the other as they are too distant and independent. It is due to Henry Kissinger who advocated the role of domestic dynamics in determining foreign policy orientation. Later on, James Rosenau came up with the concept of "Linkage Politics" where he gave equal weight to both dimensions. It is possible for regular states to determine how much domestic dynamics would influence their foreign policy. However, in case of central regional powers such as Egypt, it is essential to combine the impact of both domestic dimension and external one on the making and implementation of its foreign policy. Hence, in analyzing Egypt's regional security policy after the January 25 Revolution, it is important to consider internal, regional as well as international dimensions. We will try in this policy paper to discuss internal and regional threats to Egypt's national security and different scenarios to move forward from the best to the worst scenario.

## 2. Threats to Egypt's National Security

The geo-strategic location of Egypt has historically invited foreign invasion and has always threatened its security. However, its natural and human resources as well as the willingness of political elite, in most cases, transformed these resources into capabilities comparable to different sources of threat to its security. In the last three decades, Egypt has neutralized the Israeli threat by signing the 1978 Camp David Accords and the Peace Treaty of March 1979. In the meantime, Egypt allied itself with the United States and conservative Arab Gulf states. In fact, Egypt's political leadership in the last 30 years voluntarily gave up Egypt's central regional role to sub-regional states, and even non-state actors which challenged that role. Egypt played the role of centrifugal force as opposed to the role of a centripetal force, which it did in the 50s and 60s and even part of the 70s.

In spite of the fact that during the 18 days of the revolution, the concentration was directed toward domestic policies, after the success of the revolution in ousting the former president, the interest in Egypt's foreign policy as well as its national security came to the forefront of the national political debate. In analyzing sources of threat, we have to distinguish between internal and regional sources. However, we put them here in order according to threat intensity:

- Israel still represents a source of threat to Egypt's national security in different dimensions; on one hand, Israel is the adjacent neighbor on the Eastern borders which owns nuclear weapons. This creates serious military imbalance between Egypt and Israel. On the other hand, the Israeli unwillingness to resolve the Palestinian problem by establishing an independent Palestinian state according to UN Resolutions and the US Road Map adds a huge burden on the Egyptians and expands the forces of extremism in Egypt, the region and in the Islamic world. Moreover, Israel's continuous occupation of Syrian and Lebanese territories creates additional source of agitation for the youth in the Arab world. Israel's proposed regional land exchanges on the expense of the Egyptian sovereignty do not help at all in this regard. Furthermore, a potential Israeli, Turkish and Iranian axis in the medium range would be mainly directed against the Egyptian potential role.

- The Iranian Threat: There is no doubt that Iran is heading for the reestablishment of the Persian Empire,

and it has the right to do so as long as it does not intervene in the Egyptian sphere of vital interests especially the Gulf. Iran is successfully utilizing religion, especially the Shiite Sect, in its attempt to rebuild that empire. It aims at building a hegemonic role in the region. In fact, in the last ten years, after the US occupation of Iraq in April 2003 and the emergence of the Shiites as the most dominant power in Iraq, Iran is in control of Iraq, Syria, at least half of Lebanon, and Gaza with a potential for dominant roles in Kuwait, Bahrain and an active role in UAE, Qatar and the Eastern part of Saudi Arabia. A more serious threat to the regional role of Egypt is the Iranian zeal for nuclear weapons. There is no doubt that Iranian nuclear military power would present serious threat to the Egyptian regional role.

In spite of the recent animosity and conflictive attitude between Israel and Iran, we believe that there is strong possibility that both would get together to confront the newly emerging role of Egypt. However, Iran's attempt to expand its influence beyond its borders and its existing capabilities would negatively present a burden on the Iranian State. One has to remember that if the ascribed status is larger than the achieved status, states' ambitions will collapse.

- The Turkish Emerging Regional Role: Turkey has tremendous interests, especially trade, finance and economics, in the Arab world; however, it maintains a strong strategic military cooperation with Israel. Whether this strategic military cooperation is motivated by Turkish desire to impress the United States and the European Union (EU) in order to guarantee Turkey's entry into the EU membership or it reflects genuine interest in cooperating with Israel, we do not know. Turkey, through its role in Arab events and even Arab revolutions, might be interested in reestablishing the Ottoman Empire at least in the economic and political sense. We have no objection to that as long as it does not, again like in the case of a re-emerging Persian Empire, intervene in the regional interests of Egypt. In the analysis of regions, sub-regions and regional powers there are central powers, neighboring powers and external powers. Both Iran and Turkey, and in many cases we could add Ethiopia, represent neighboring powers which have their own national interests and interactions with the region. Egypt represents the core of the Arab region with its own national interests that might be compatible or incompatible with theirs.

- Domestic Socioeconomic and Political Dynamics: the transformation from authoritarianism to democracy in Egypt led to the emergence of prominent and strong actors such as political Islam, liberal forces, regrouping of the remnants of the old regime as well as the military establishment in its political outfit. There is definitely competition among these forces in addition to young revolutionaries to grasp political power in the country. So far, the two major dominating powers are the military and political Islam. However, the election of the first civilian president would support a more active role of political Islam.

The transition to democracy has just begun and power reconfiguration is going on. It aims at introducing the politics of inclusion rather than the policies of exclusion. On the other hand, all these forces are busy in trying to define what social justice means and how it could be achieved. The politics of inclusion means economically and socially that all social strata feel satisfied with the distribution of wealth and national resources. It is very well-known that Egyptian economy nowadays is suffering from a lack of sufficient funds – both internal and external. And this in spite of the fact that Egyptian monetary policy has so far saved the Egyptian economy from major economic interruptions such as inflation or even recession. For policymakers, the combination of restructuring political balance and economic wellbeing represents not only a challenge but also a threat to stability and social equilibrium.

### 3. Policy Options

In light of the socioeconomic diversity among Arab countries, Israel and regional powers, we could envision three major policy scenarios; the best scenario is the one which would lead to peace and security, regional cooperation and positive interactions between Egypt and other regional players; the second is the worst scenario where conflicts, animosities as well as crisis would continue and potentials for anarchy might exist; the third is the status quo which is impossible to sustain or even tolerate.

- Cooperative and Peaceful Middle East and Arab Sub-Systems: This means that Israeli security will be respected by regional players, that a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its Capital is established, that Turkish and Iranian respect of national sovereignties of all states is guaranteed, and that the international system takes a fair and just stand towards regional

issues. In this case, normalization of relations between Egypt and different regional players takes place. Egypt's New Republic, heading for more FDI, active tourism, foreign aid, remittances and more income from the Suez Canal, indicates the eagerness to reach this state of regional security. This state of regional security, in light of changing international balance of power and the move towards conciliatory multilateral system, would provide Egypt's New Republic with more opportunities to expand its foreign policy and international interactions toward Asia and other regions. Within this scenario, and even the other two scenarios, Egypt is committed to the Peace Treaty with Israel. In fact, the new leadership has clearly announced this commitment more than once. This cooperative and peaceful environment is possible through mutual understanding, open negotiations and future vision of creating more integrative trends which would benefit all parties.

- Disintegrative and Conflictive Middle East and Arab World: In this case, Israel will not negotiate with the Palestinians, continue expanding settlements on Palestinian land, maintain its military occupation of Golan Heights and Lebanese territories. Moreover, there is a high possibility that Iran, in its search for regional hegemony would ally itself with Israel and Turkey, which has strategic military cooperation with Israel. The international system would continue its double standard stand against the Arabs and the Palestinians. Cooptation between international actors and both conservative and radical Arab states would increase. Radical non-state actors such as Hezb Allah and many more to come would intensify their challenge to the state system and increase the possibilities of violence and anarchy. This destructive scenario would definitely undermine Egypt's New Republic which seeks stability, peace and cooperation in the region.

- Explosive and Intolerable Status Quo: Existing regional tensions and domestic conflicts in a number of Arab states do not help at all in sustaining the status quo which might be of interest to certain regional actors such as Israel, Iran and Turkey. Each of these three actors, exogenous to the Arab system, has its own strategy toward the future of the region. Over the last 30 years they were able to implement some aspects of that strategy in the region while the ousted leadership of Egypt abandoned both the regional strategy and the regional role. The combination between regional security imbalances and internal oppression and poverty

challenged the status quo which these regional powers were eager to maintain.

Arab revolutions, leading to new regimes and new republics, do reject all status quo arrangements. They seek to move forward from that explosive and intolerable environment to a more peaceful and cooperative one.

#### 4. Costs and Benefits

In calculating costs and benefits of each scenario, we have to bear in mind the human elements in both the Arab world and the Middle East. Arab revolutions did not only generate eagerness toward the democratization process, it also created expectations for higher quality of life through rational social public policy decisions. Hence, disintegrative and conflictive as well as explosive and intolerable scenarios would produce frustration and more tendencies toward violence. All regional parties will be big losers and the cost will be massive.

However, going on with the cooperative and integrative scenario, which is based on negotiations, compromises and give and take strategy would definitely be less expensive and more beneficial to the new generations in all parties.

While in case of the worst scenario and status quo scenario ideologies and religions will be highly utilized and abused to recruit extremists and fanatics, the cooperative and integrative scenario would be based on policy options and pragmatic rational decisions. While the first two scenarios will be propagated by leaders who think they have charismatic traits, the best scenario would be advocated and implemented by statesmen who understand how to achieve the needs of their people through regional and international cooperation.

#### 6. Conclusion

Ousting Mubarak from the whole world does not mean, at all, that there is a threat to regional security in the Middle East. Domestic dynamics in Egypt and in different Arab states after Arab revolutions do not interfere with regional balance of power in a drastic way. In the case of Egypt, what political emerging new forces seek is parity and partnership rather than

dependency. They are looking for interactive relationships based on reciprocity and mutual respect of national interests of each party. It is in Egypt's interest to negotiate with all regional players a regional vision of economic cooperation for large-scale economic, financial and industrial projects and installations. What is needed at this moment is regional initiative toward this goal.



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