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DEMOCRATIZATION AND ISLAMIZATION IN EGYPT:
COUNTERBALANCING FORCES FOR AUTOCRACY

By

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Abstract

Promoting democracy is one of three core objectives outlined by President Clinton in *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*. Democratization, however, is a complex concept. There is “no universally accepted or clearly defined model of democracy, even of Western democracy, that can simply be adopted by people engaging in democratization.”¹

Egypt is engaged in the dynamics of democratization amidst resurgence of political Islam among its 94% Muslim population. “As a result of its cultural, economic, and military influence, what happens in Egypt is of disproportionate importance to US policy.”²

How Egypt answers the juxtaposed calls by its populace for empowerment through democratization and Islamization could result in actions counter to regional stability and the interests of the United States. The key variable in this equation is how the Islamist movement is dealt with. Algeria offers a brief example of full Islamist empowerment in a situation similar to Egypt’s, the result of which continues to have a profound impact on Egyptian politics.

This paper begins by examining the basic characteristics of democracy, to include linkages between Islam and democracy. It then looks at the preconditions serving as the impetus for both democratization and Islamization from the perspectives of the government and the people. Divergent interests emerge, that when coupled with the existing power base, answer the question of where Egypt’s empowerment movements are headed.

Egypt will continue to repress its strongest critics while using coercion to maintain the legitimacy necessary to continue the status quo – a very slow movement toward democracy through liberalization. Liberalization will take place only when required to mollify threats to governmental stability.

Notes

¹ John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32.

² Ambassador Edward S. Walker, Jr., “United States-Egyptian Relations: Strengthening our Partnership,” *SAIS Review: A Journal of International Affairs* XVII, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1997): 152.

Introduction

The resurgence of Islam and the desire for democratization in the Muslim world exist in a dynamic global context. Throughout the world, many peoples express similar desires, making religious resurgence and democratization two of the most important themes in contemporary world affairs.

— John L. Esposito and John O. Voll¹

President Mubarak's regime labors daily to maintain its political status quo – the equilibrium between its multiparty authoritarian government and the ever-present forces for democratization and Islamization. These three often-contentious forces punctuate the last two decades of Egypt's history. Their intersection influences movement toward democracy and will likely continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Most notably, Islamist movements unwittingly impact the political dynamics within Egypt by acting as a counterweight in the equation of democratic development, slowing and often reversing its progress.

This political “status quo” is important to the United States in light of stated national security objectives and the rebirth of Egypt as political and religious leader in both North Africa and the Middle East. In a recent speech to the Denver Summit of the Eight Initiative on Democracy, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott remarked that weaving the promotion of human rights and democracy into the fabric of our diplomacy as a whole is “an imperative of realpolitik, not just of idealpolitik.”²

Promoting democracy is one of three core objectives outlined by President Clinton in *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*. Fundamental to his objective is the belief that “democratic governments are more likely to cooperate with each other against

common threats and to encourage free and open trade and economic development – and less likely to wage war or abuse the rights of people.”³ Regional stability is also implicit in President Clinton’s national security strategy, especially where its absence would negatively impact American economic security by destabilizing the global economy. Egypt, or more specifically the Mubarak regime, is a key player in this arena.

The former United States Ambassador to Egypt, Edward S. Walker, Jr., clearly explained Egypt’s importance in his recent article on United States–Egyptian relations when he said:

As a result of its cultural, economic, and military influence, what happens in Egypt is of disproportionate importance to US policy. Instability in Cairo could have severe consequences for the [Arab-Israeli] peace process and for our strategic ability to ensure the supply of oil from the Gulf. The impact of instability, particularly if it were to result from the growth of [Islamist] fundamentalism, could have collateral effects in other Arab capitals, reinforcing the regime in Sudan, tipping the balance in Libya and Algeria, and emboldening opponents of moderate regimes in other Arab states. Dominoes is too simple an analogy for application to the complexities of the Middle East, but we would certainly face a more difficult and possibly hostile environment if Egypt turned to [Islamist] fundamentalism.⁴

Furthermore, the State Department’s official position is that democracies are more likely to be reliable partners in trade and diplomacy.⁵

Egypt is at the crossroads of divergent political interests, each seeking its own empowerment. Islamist movements seek to shift Egypt’s political culture toward an Islamic solution. The various Islamist movements, however, each define that “solution” somewhat differently. Other segments within the population seek a greater voice in the affairs of state through democratization for Egypt’s political future. Although these two political interests share some views, beliefs concerning sectarian versus secular political leadership often separate them. The ruling elites of Egypt’s multiparty autocracy seek to

retain their own power and wealth in spite of the interests of these groups. They are content to use coercion, containment, or repression to ensure their position remains intact. The relationships between these coexistent and conflicting interests form a political model, the dynamics of which illustrate how they not only counterbalance each other, but also make predicting the results of their interaction possible.

Islamization and democratization are complex ideals that defy universally agreed upon definitions. As such, this study will initially focus on establishing the definitions and characteristics attendant to these two political concepts. Terms like “democracy” and “Islamic Democracy” which are particularly important in understanding Egypt’s political dynamics, will also be defined. Of course, defining these terms and ideals necessitates their assessment within the context of Egypt’s current political environment.

Next the study will explore some of the preconditions within Egypt’s society and government that provide the impetus behind these political interests. Like most divergent forces in nature, Islamization, democratization, and autocracy seek, achieve, and routinely re-achieve equilibrium within Egypt. When modeled, the interactions of these three major forces in Egypt’s political scene allow one to predict where its political growth is headed. The final focus of this study will be an explanation of this proposed “Egyptian Equilibrium Model.” Understanding the interaction of competing interests through the use of this model helps see how Egypt’s divergent interests and existing power structure portend a continuation of its political “status quo” – with very slow, if any, real progress toward democracy through intermittent efforts at liberalization.

Notes

¹ John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1996), p. 11.

² Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State, “Democracy and the International Interest.” Remarks to the Denver Summit of the Eight Initiative on Democracy, Washington, D.C., 1 October 1997, http://www.gov/policy_remarks/.

³ *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1997), 2.

⁴ Ambassador Edward S. Walker, Jr., “United States-Egyptian Relations: Strengthening our Partnership,” *SAIS Review: A Journal of International Affairs* XVII, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1997): 152.

⁵ Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State, “Democracy and the International Interest.” Remarks to the Denver Summit of the Eight Initiative on Democracy, Washington, D.C., 1 October 1997, http://www.gov/policy_remarks/.

Defining Democracy and Democratization

. . . it is clear that there is no universally accepted or clearly defined model of democracy, even of Western Democracy, that can simply be adopted by people engaging in democratization.

– John L. Esposito and John O. Voll¹

Democracy is a complex concept whose meaning varies widely. It connotes something different to both individuals and political movements, especially across cultures whose frames of reference vary significantly. This is especially true between Western and Arab cultures like the United States and Egypt. Regardless of venue, man's innate drive to exercise choice in the conduct of life is certainly the impetus for movement toward democracy. Cultural differences, however, also affect this drive. Such differences make any discourse involving democracy and democratization of little value without first establishing their contextual meaning – as they apply to Egypt.

Democracy

According to Samuel P. Huntington, democracy has most recently been defined “. . . in terms of *sources of authority* for government, *purposes served* by government, and *procedures* for constituting government.”² Of these three approaches, the most common is to focus on the institutional or procedural aspects of constituting democratic government. Delineating institutional or procedural characteristics whose presence signals the existence of democracy facilitates both a clearer understanding of the term democracy, while concomitantly providing a tangible framework for assessing progress towards achievement of the concept. What are these defining characteristics?

Huntington, Dahl, Schumpeter, and Ghadbian each outline particularly useful, and often overlapping, criteria for what constitutes democracy in their essays on the subject. Collectively, their characteristics fall into four major categories: the election of political leadership, the existence of basic civil and political freedoms, a pluralistic political structure, and accountability of government to the populace. Together, these categories of characteristics adequately provide a basic sense of what democracy is, or should be, not only in Egypt, but also in any society.

Election of Political Leadership

Regardless of source, the one characteristic included in all definitions of democracy is selection of government leadership by the populace of the nation-state through elections. In *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Joseph A. Schumpeter succinctly establishes this characteristic in a widely accepted procedural definition. He states:

...the role of the people is to produce a government, or else an intermediate body which in turn will produce a national executive or government. And we define: the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.³

Within democratic government, the basis of political decisions is representation of the people's will by elected officials. Schumpeter's use of the term "competitive struggle" implies elections that are both free and fair. As Huntington states, "Elections, open, free, and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non."⁴

Najib Ghadbian asserts that elections must be periodic and encompass all effective decision-making positions in the government. He further asserts that their "...end result is a peaceful transition of government."⁵ Free and fair elections must, however, occur in

an atmosphere conducive to the democratic process – an atmosphere represented by a preponderance of the characteristics found in the other three descriptive categories.

Civil and Political Freedoms

Robert Dahl's position that democracy must facilitate *contestation* and *participation* is essential to ensuring an environment conducive to democracy – one characterized by civil and political freedoms. *Contestation* encompasses the ability and procedures for individuals or groups to disagree with the policies and actions of the government. Such an environment must include those freedoms that enable disagreement and freedom of expression – free speech; free press; freedom to organize, join, and participate in organizations (to include political parties); and freedom to assemble. Implicit in these freedoms is easy access to information from alternate sources, all of which are uncensored. *Participation* encompasses the ability and procedures for individuals or groups to promulgate change within the government. It infers the right to vote for all adult citizens and the equitable execution of the rule of law within both society and the government process.⁶

All of these freedoms must, however, exist in an atmosphere characterized by respect for, and protection of, human rights. Equitable application of law in protecting civil liberties and human rights fosters procedural stability in the presence of contentious views as the democratic process works. Without these protections, freedom of expression and peaceful political action are abridged and democracy falters.

Pluralistic Political Structure

Social and political diversity exists within all nations. In a democracy, the political structure formally recognizes and accommodates this pluralism. If civil and political

freedoms exist as outlined in the previous two sections, but elections fail to offer choices to the populace representing their beliefs and interests, there is no democracy. It is inconceivable that the beliefs and interests of one political entity will ever be the same as those of the entire population of a nation. The political structure of a democracy must be characterized by liberal freedom to organize legitimate political parties; eligibility of those parties to run for, win, and actually hold political office; and access to public media commensurate with other political entities.

National political structure must foster formal representation of socially diverse views within the democratic process. This representation must be more than staged. It must not be limited by ruling elites to protect an incumbent government. Pluralism demands that the political structure must truly accommodate the organization and empowerment of social and political entities with distinct and often divergent views. Elections are only meaningful when they offer choices that represent the major interests and points of view found in the citizenry.

Acknowledgment and empowerment of political parties must include unencumbered eligibility to compete within the system for election to public office. Out of fairness, this includes equitable access by all parties to uncensored media in the conduct of election campaigning. Formal recognition of diverse entities (political parties) without the right to freely campaign, compete, and serve within government if elected fairly relegates the democratic political process to a sham.

Accountability of Government to the Populace

Elected officials must be accountable to the public while they serve. If not, the people's selection of government leaders to represent their views could easily lose the

effect of its intent. As such, a system of checks and balances is necessary to ensure that decisions are not autocratic. Democratic government is also characterized by a responsive mechanism for removing elected officials from office if they violate preestablished laws for that purpose.

Summary

These four categories of characteristics for defining democracy deal with two issues. First is the creation of a climate conducive to fully empowering citizens of a nation with the means for a meaningful voice in government. Second, they address the process through which that voice is exercised – open, free, and fair elections with a system of checks and balances to hold government accountable to the electorate between elections.

Table 1: Election Assessment Checklist

Time Period	FREE	FAIR
Before Polling Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of movement • Freedom of speech (for candidates, the media, voters, and others) • Freedom of assembly and association • Freedom from fear in connection with the election and the electoral campaign • Equal and universal suffrage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of an independent and impartial election commission • Absence of impediments to inclusion in the electoral register • Impartial treatment of candidates by the police, the army, and the courts of law • Equal opportunities for political parties and independent candidates to run for election • Equal access to a publicly controlled media
On Polling Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to participate in the election 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to all polling stations for representatives of the political parties, accredited local and international election observers and the media • Secrecy of the ballot • Absence of intimidation of voters • Proper accounting procedures • Impartial protection of polling stations
After Polling Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal possibilities of complaint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impartial treatment of any election complaints • Acceptance of election results by everyone involved • Official / expeditious announcement of election results

Source: Jørgen Elklit and Palle Svensson, “What Makes Elections Free and Fair?,” *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 8, Number 3 (July 1997): 37.

Jørgen Elklit and Palle Svensson, both of whom have advised on and monitored elections in Africa, offer an extensive election assessment checklist that succinctly outlines criteria for achieving the standard of “free and fair.” Their thesis is in harmony

with the concept of democracy that forms the basis of my analysis and applies beyond elections. Of their criteria, those pertinent to Egyptian politics are listed in Table 1 above.

Democratization

“Democratization is the process of moving from non-democratic or authoritarian forms of government to democratic forms of government.”⁷ According to Huntington, the critical point in the process is the replacement of a government that was not chosen through open, free, and fair elections by one that is. Moving along the continuum from autocracy to democracy, liberalization is often encountered. It is important to recognize the difference.

Liberalization, ... is the partial opening of an authoritarian system short of choosing governmental leaders through freely competitive elections. Liberalizing authoritarian regimes may release political prisoners, open up some issues for public debate, loosen censorship, sponsor elections for officers that have little power, permit some renewal of civil society, and take other steps in a democratic direction, without submitting top decision makers to the electoral contest. Liberalization may or may not lead to full-scale democratization.⁸

What is the impetus that drives this process for change? As Rustow states, “the most powerful impetus to change in this era has been the global trend of intensifying communication and economic integration.”⁹ More accurately, it is man’s need for the empowerment of choice – his innate desire to participate in personal and societal governance. The worldwide revolution of technology, communications, and travel about which Dankwart A. Rustow speaks, merely heightens this desire through increased situational awareness that life can be better, and is so in democratic nations.¹⁰ At its very essence, democratization is a response to dissatisfaction by the populace with the status

quo coupled with a perception that democracy offers a process for choice that will resolve the causes of their dissatisfaction.

Egypt – At the Crossroads

Scholars and diplomats agree that there is a movement for democratization in Egypt. What are the sources of dissatisfaction driving this movement? A detailed answer to this question could fill volumes. At the macro level, however, three trends surface that explain current dissatisfaction within the populace and feed their desire for change. They are (1) a socioeconomic imbalance, (2) a religious resurgence, and (3) a lack of legitimacy of the current ruling elites with the masses. These trends are not mutually exclusive; they are intertwined and mutually supportive.

Socioeconomic Imbalance

Egypt's economy is fraught with problems at both the macro- and microeconomic levels. At the macroeconomic level, ongoing efforts by the Mubarak regime, supported by contributions from outside agencies like the International Monetary Fund and the United States Agency for International Development (\$17.5 billion since 1975) are making headway. According to the United States Ambassador to Egypt, Edward S. Walker, these collective efforts have stabilized Egypt's economy and created a workable infrastructure for microeconomic improvements within the country.¹¹ The *Economist* Intelligence Unit's (EIU) forecast confirms this assessment with a relatively favorable prediction for Egypt's progress in the next few years.

At the microeconomic level, where the population most feels the impact, the news is not as promising. EIU's forecast is that "reforms will at first widen the already large gulf

in living standards between the elite and the mass of the population before standards as a whole rise significantly, fueling the discontent which has provided the radical Islamist movements with such fertile recruiting ground in Middle Egypt.”¹²

For the masses this equates to a continued rise in unemployment (currently above 20%) and inflation that exceeds income growth, thereby widening the wealth gap. Egypt’s annual population growth of 2% exacerbates this negative economic trend. A majority of Egypt’s populace is already living at or below the poverty line. Depending on the source, estimates run between 70% to 80%.

These forces combine to create a sense of desperation that severely impacts Egypt’s young adults. The al-Azhar University Cairo University in Cairo are full of bright, technically educated young Egyptians with dismal prospects for employment. Since the late 1980s, literally “hundreds of thousands of university graduates found jobs and housing impossible to obtain.”¹³ Although the government guarantees employment for graduates, the current waiting list for public sector jobs is as long as ten years. When finally hired, it is common for graduates to be grossly overeducated or overqualified for the work they are asked to perform.

Situational awareness of these problems and societal inequities is high. The disaffected Egyptian masses are dissatisfied with this “status quo” and believe relief lies in two areas. First, many feel the current government has forsaken them and seek a voice in the government to ensure their interests are represented and that government is accountable to the people it serves - them. Second, like many religious oriented cultures, they seek solace in their faith – Islam. Egypt is 94% Sunni Muslim and 6% Coptic Christian.¹⁴

Islamic Resurgence

Islamic resurgence has been a force in Egyptian politics for decades. More than the promulgation of an Islamic political worldview, Islamic resurgence answered the call of Egypt's impoverished. As lower middle-class and impoverished citizens sought solace in their faith, the Islamic movement not only answered their spiritual and emotional needs, but also their physical needs. Using their network of mosques, Islamists established hospitals, clinics, day-care centers, youth clubs, legal aid societies, foreign language schools, banks, publishing houses, and drug rehabilitation programs.¹⁵ According to Ambassador Walker, they offered "free school books and after school tutoring, both highly prized and unobtainable in any other way by the majority of impoverished Egyptians."¹⁶ They provided responsive relief to socioeconomic problems that the government could not, or would not, provide.

Islamic organizations are effective agents of social and political change. They continue to develop alternative socioeconomic institutions and to participate in the political process (at least where they can circumnavigate constraints from the Mubarak government), thereby demonstrating their strength in institution-building and popular mobilization."¹⁷ Dissatisfaction with the ruling elites increases with each successful solution from an Islamic organization that works in spite of government. The result – Islamic resurgence raises expectations of what the government should be capable of doing for the people. Reality consistently fails to meet these expectations and the disaffected masses see a clear solution – government based on Islamic principles that are already working in the Islamic community. To promote this solution within government, Islamists must gain an increased voice. The drive for increased governmental

participation grows accordingly. Of course, this empowerment can come peacefully or through violent militancy.

Faltering Legitimacy of the Ruling Elites

Islam's rise in influence heightens Muslim sensitivity to government corruption and actions that run counter to its tenets and the country's *shari`a* based law. The Mubarak regime is increasingly seen as corrupt. The masses see President Mubarak as a leader whose elections are rigged.¹⁸ His family and cabinet are alleged to be receiving lucrative illegal commissions, while his appointed ministers are involved in a myriad of illegal activities like theft of foreign assistance funds, illegal use of public funds for personal businesses, and accepting bribes, just to name a few. Furthermore, President Mubarak's "restrictions on political participation hinder the emergence of representatives who can negotiate agreements on behalf of constituencies. All of Mubarak's cabinets have been comprised of technocrats, none of whom could claim to represent a nongovernmental constituency, or to have an extragovernmental base of political power."¹⁹ Government, at least in the minds of the masses, does not represent them. It has forsaken them and what they believe in.

With each successful program and each family Islamists help through rough times, Islamic movements solidify their efficacy as a salient religious and political force capable of providing for the masses. Islamist successes increase Islam's legitimacy as the answer to Egypt's needs and confirms the truth of Islam as God's way in the minds its adherents. As if inversely proportional, when Islam's legitimacy as a potential solution rises, the legitimacy of Mubarak's ruling elites falters. Dissatisfaction with the current "status

quo” is fueled by these perceptions and again the drive for increased empowerment in government is fueled.

Notes

¹ John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1996), p. 32.

² Samuel p. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 6.

³ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1950), p. 269.

⁴ Huntington, p7.

⁵ Najib Ghabdian, *Democratization and the Islamist Challenge in the Arab World* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1997), p. 4.

⁶ Huntington, p. 9.

⁷ Larry P. Goodson and Soha Radwan, “Democratization in Egypt in the 1990s: Stagnant, or Merely Stalled?.” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19, Issue 1 (Winter 1997): np.

⁸ Huntington, p 9.

⁹ Dankwart A. Rustow, “Democracy: A Global Revolution?,” *Foreign Affairs* 69, No. 4 (Fall 1990): p. 79.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 79-82.

¹¹ Ambassador Edward S. Walker, Jr., “United States-Egyptian Relations: Strengthening our Partnership,” *SAIS Review: A Journal of International Affairs* XVII, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1997): pp. 156-157.

¹² “*Egypt: Country Report*,” Third Quarter, 1997 (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 8 December 1997), np.

¹³ John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1996), p. 181.

¹⁴ “The World Factbook page on Egypt.” On-line. Internet, 18 January 1997, p. 3. Available from <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/nsolo/factbook/eg.htm>.

¹⁵ Esposito and Voll, p. 178.

¹⁶ Walker, p. 153.

¹⁷ Esposito and Voll, p. 178.

¹⁸ Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State – Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.), pp. 415-417.

¹⁹ Cassandra, “The Impending Crisis in Egypt,” *The Middle East Journal* 49, No. 1 (Winter 1995): pp190-191.

Islamists and Islamic Democracy

Islamic resurgence, reflected in the rise of Islamist groups in the political arena, poses a serious challenge to the ruling elites in most Arab states.

– Najib Ghadbian¹

The preceding discussion highlights the prominent and growing position Islamists and Islamic movements have in today's Egyptian society. Socioeconomic imbalance at the microeconomic level and the growing loss of legitimacy are the impetus for Islamization in Egyptian society. To better understand these powerful forces for change, some key questions must be answered. What is Islamization? What is an Islamist? What are the major Islamic movements in Egypt working for changes in government? Are these forces compatible with democracy?

Islamization

Islamization is the process of moving from a secular based government to a government grounded in the principles of Islam. It is evidenced in Egypt by the emergence of Islam as a proactive force for political change and social development. More importantly, however, the body of Islamic law, or *shari`a*, is the foundation of Islamization and the expectation of egalitarian treatment for members of the Islamic community, or *umma*, is its cornerstone. Islamization does not mandate the rejection of modern and Western ideas, but rather seeks to harmonize them with Islam.²

The ultimate end state of Islamization is the creation of an Islamic political state. Specificity beyond this point, however, is problematic. Neither the *shari`a* or the Quran, Islam's most important document, stipulate what form this Islamic state or its

government should take. Compounding this uncertainty, the Prophet Muhammad did not appoint a successor to rule the *umma*, nor did he answer this issue in other forums before his death.³

Islamists – Who are they?

Islamists are Muslims with an activist political agenda. They vigorously seek an Islamic solution to what they perceive to be the existing problems in government and society. In all cases, their solutions call for Islam's influence to be central to both politics and the private sector. As Ghabbian explains, Islamists “want to shift the frame of reference in the public realm to one in which Islam, in its various interpretations, is a major shaping force.”⁴

Although they share a common ideological framework, Islamist groups differ on almost every other substantive issue. Their differences include:

- the specific form the end state government of an Islamic state should take
- the strictness to which the *shari`a* is interpreted
- their views on democracy
- how to gain greater participation and voice in government

In spite of the variety of issues on which Islamist movements differ, they fall into two categories: radicals and moderates.

Radical Islamists

Radical Islamists are characterized by a “militant ideological outlook, and believe in the necessity of challenging the whole existing [political] order.”⁵ If a demographic profile of radical Islamists could be gathered, it would reflect that segment of Egyptian society whose future seems most desperate: the lower class, young university graduates

with little hope for employment or social mobility, and those young adults most negatively affected by Egypt's faltering economy. Because of their desperation, radical Islamists advocate the use of violence for political ends. One Egyptian expert on radical groups asserts that violence serves as revenge against government police for human rights violations, a means to demonstrate the instability of the existing government and a way to announce their displeasure as an organized political force.⁶ There are upwards of twenty such radical Islamist organization whose membership is traditionally small.

The largest and most notorious group of radical Islamists is *al-Gam`a al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Group), who attempted to assassinate President Mubarak in 1995 and killed 58 tourists at the Queen Hatshepsut temple in Luxor on November 17, 1997. This same group attacked a German tour bus last September, killing nine tourists and their Egyptian driver. Their immediate demand in this attack was that the government address the root causes for the people's despair: poverty, unemployment, and limited political freedoms.⁷ Taking up arms in 1992, *al-Gam`a al-Islamiyya's* stated goal is to overthrow President Mubarak's secular government and install a strict Islamic state.⁸

Other radical Islamist groups may be less visibly active, but they share *al-Gam`a al-Islamiyya's* view that violent means are needed to depose the current government and promote Islam through power. Participation in the existing system with the goal of changing it from within is simply not palatable to them. They believe that the ruling elites will protect their position of advantage and block needed changes. Violence and power thus become a more tenable solution than patience.

Moderate Islamists

Moderate Islamists operate on the premise that changes are possible by working within existing institutions. They see radical Islamists as violating the tenets of the Quran, thereby damaging the Islamist position. Furthermore, moderate Islamists recognize the relationship between violence and the host of negative reactions it generates – government retaliation through harsh measures that violate the human rights of fellow Muslims, increasing the government’s distrust of all Islamists, and the loss of much needed income from tourism, etc.

The demographics of the moderate Islamist movement explain their proclivity for a more peaceful approach to political change. Their ranks are filled with middle and lower-middle class Muslims, most of whom are older than their radical brothers. A number of them are lawyers, doctors, university professors, engineers and professionals of the like. Of Egypt’s twenty-five associations, or syndicates, representing a total membership of roughly three million, moderate Islamists make up only about fifteen percent. Nevertheless, they comprise an inordinate percentage of the internal leadership of these syndicates. As such, they are in a position to exert influence in a much more powerful segment of Egyptian society than the radical Islamists.

The Muslim Brotherhood is the largest and most powerful Islamist group. Founded in 1927, its methods were not always moderate. During the Mubarak years, however, its actions are, and continue to be, moderate. In spite of government laws prohibiting the establishment of religious based political parties, members of the Muslim Brotherhood have gained access to Egypt’s People’s Assembly by running as Independents aligned with legally sanctioned parties.

In coalition with the New Wafd Party during the 1984 elections, the Muslim Brotherhood gained eight seats in the People's Assembly. In 1987, the Brotherhood gained thirty-seven seats as part of the Islamic Alliance – a coalition between the Socialist Labor Party and the Liberal Socialist Party. Their representation dropped to only one seat in the 1995 elections.⁹

Summary

Moderate Islamists wield more political clout throughout Egypt. Their methods of gradual change through preaching, building Islamic economic institutions, providing health care and social services, supporting education, gaining control of professional organizations, and ultimately gaining greater popularity and participation in existing government (to include elections when possible) appeal to the populace. They are peaceful and hence in concert with Islamic values. They provide immediate support for those who need it most.¹⁰

Democratization is compatible with the moderate Islamist approach. Respect for human rights and a desire for popular participation in government through elections are already part of their basic ideology. In fact, a March 1994 report from the International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, states that the “Islamic mainstream has come to accept crucial elements of political democracy: pluralism (within the framework of Islam), political participation, government accountability, the rule of law and the protection of human rights.”¹¹ As Esposito and Voll assert, “the process of democratization and Islamic resurgence have become complementary forces in many countries.”¹² Egypt is no exception.

Islamic Democracy

Defining Islamic Democracy is equally as difficult as was defining democracy earlier in this study. Synthesis of the requisite principles for an Islamic state as outlined by Muhammad Asad, and summarized by Ghabbian, together with a crosswalk by Esposito and Voll of contemporary Islamic views of these principles, yields a model that I believe depicts the structural essence of Islamic Democracy.

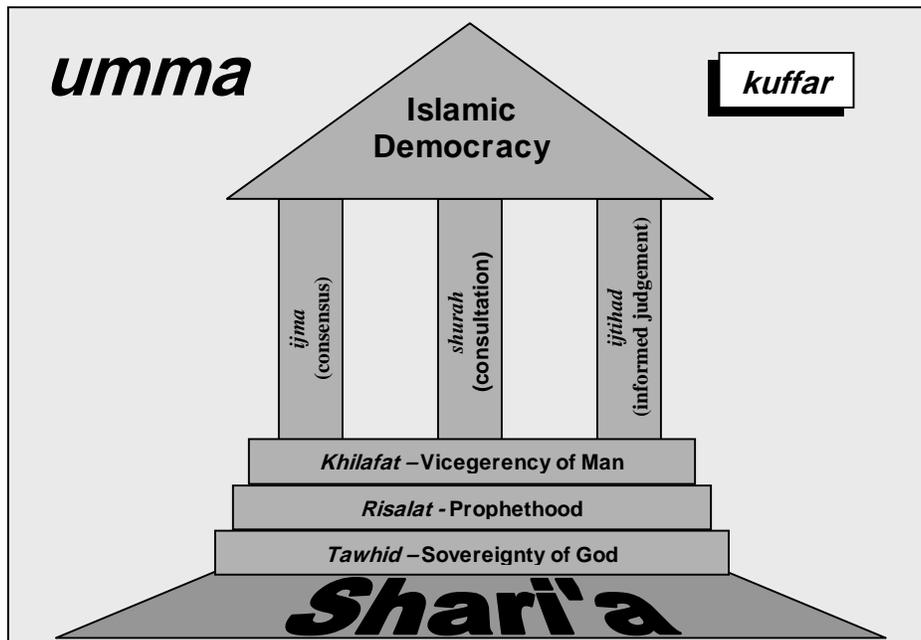


Figure 1: Islamic Democracy Model

The aim of Islamic Democracy is to provide the populace with an authentic Islamic polity that ensures justice for the community and works for its prosperity while incorporating the popular political participation. Moving from the bottom of the model to the top, I will explain how each of the components of the structure defines essential elements of Islamic Democracy.

Foundation

The *shari`a* (Islamic law), is the foundation of Islamic polity and society. Asad explains this when he explains that being “Divine Law, the *shari`a* cannot possibly have been made dependent on scholarly deductions or inferences of a subjective nature, but must be considered to have been laid down in its entirety in the definite ordinances of Qur`an and Sunnah.”¹³ The *shari`a* represents a “constitutional” order for Muslim societies.¹⁴ Important to all Muslims, in 1980, Islamists and secular Muslims pressured Egypt’s government to make the *shari`a* basic source of Egyptian law and succeeded.

Base¹⁵

The base of Islamic democracy parallels the basis of Islamic belief. The major Sunni Muslim thinker, Abu al-Ala al-Mawdudi, posits that as a political system, Islam is based on three core concepts: *Tawheed* (Sovereignty of God), *Risalat* (Prophethood) and *Khilafat* (Vicegerency of Man).

Tawheed is perhaps the central principle or belief in Islam. It is the acceptance that “There is no God but God.” This describes the view among Muslims that God is the sole sovereign and his will is paramount to all else.

Risalat is the acceptance that Muhammad was the last and penultimate prophet of the one sovereign, God. As such, the Quran and the Summa become the unequivocal base documents for the conduct of life, whether spiritual or temporal. This, of course, applies to political as well as societal issues.

Khilafat refers to the concept of the vicegerency of man. Originally applied to leaders of the Islamic community after the Prophet Muhammad’s death, its importance in the context of Islamic Democracy is its application to the legitimacy of leaders in the

community. Although originally applied to a single “successor” to Muhammad, contemporary thinkers have extended its meaning. More specifically, Mawdudi asserts that the Quran contains passages whose interpretation is of mankind as God’s representative on earth. In this capacity, the society of believers “carries the responsibility of the caliphate as a whole and each one of its individual[s] shares the Divine Caliphate. This is the point where democracy begins in Islam.”¹⁶ Grounded in the Quran and Sunnah, founded on the *shari`a* and based on the three core principles of political Islam, an Islamic polity can be built and supported.

Pillars

Three longstanding Islamic concepts form the pillars that support Islamic Democracy: *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), *ijma* (consensus), and *shurah* (consultation). Their concepts are similar to Western ideas about democratic process, but are more prescriptive as they apply to the *umma*.

The *shari`a* is brief and was never intended to provide detailed legislation to cover every circumstance. As such, Muslims believe that God, the Law-Giver, intended for them to use *ijtihad* (independent reasoning or independent interpretive judgement) to derive these answers or laws in conformity with the spirit of Islam.¹⁷ Of course, such latitude is subject to varying interpretations and potential abuse.

The concept of *ijma* (consensus) is a check and balance on such misinterpretation or abuse. As Ghadbian explains, it is the duty of all religious people to participate in *ijtihad*, and when the community is able to reach a consensus, their decision becomes binding on the *umma*. It transforms the independent judgement of each Muslim into the collective

judgement of the Islamic community. The veracity of this principle is traceable to the Prophet Muhammad who stated, “My Community will not agree upon an error.”¹⁸

These two concepts (*ijtihad* and *ijma*) also apply to the selection of leaders within the community. Moderate Islamists generally agree that open, free, and fair elections are the most appropriate method for selecting community leaders.¹⁹

The last pillar supporting the concept of Islamic Democracy is that of *shurah* (consultation). According to Asad’s interpretation, by Quranic mandate “political business [is] not only consequent upon, but synonymous with, consultation: which means that the legislative powers of the state must be vested in an assembly chosen by the community specifically for this purpose.”²⁰ Expounding on this mandate, Ghabbian adds that leaders have an obligation to consult with the people throughout legislative and decision-making processes. Consultation with the community is thus an ongoing process.

Community: *Umma* vs *Kuffar*

The concept of Islamic Democracy is straightforward with regard to its application to and empowerment from the community. It is important to note, however, that the community to which it applies is the Islamic community or *umma*. The conduct of democracy is grounded in the principles and concepts of Islam. Where then do non-Muslims, like Egypt’s Coptic Christians fall within the paradigm?

They are classified as *kuffar* (unbelievers). This is a contentious issue as their representation in an Islamic Democracy has the potential to violate the precepts upon which the model was built. Some Islamists advocate that they be considered *dhimmi* (protected people of the book) and be taken care of within the provisions of Islamic law.

This, however, precludes them from the rights of full citizenship and could subject them to a special tax for the privilege of being “protected” by the *umma*.

Naturally, this would only take place if Islamic Democracy as outlined above were achieved in its ideal state. This has not been the case in any Arab country. The thought – or fear as the case may be – of it happening is enough to set counterbalancing forces in motion that achieve equilibrium in Egypt.

Notes

¹ Najib Ghabbian, *Democratization and the Islamist Challenge in the Arab World* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1997), p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³ Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge), p.6.

⁴ Ayubi, p. 59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73

⁶ Ghabbian, p. 69.

⁷ “Extremism Falters Despite Cairo Attack.” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 22 September 1997, International Edition.

⁸ “Egypt Hits States That ‘Shelter’ Islamic Militants.” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 November 1997, International Edition.

⁹ Ghabbian., p. 92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

¹¹ Ghabbian., p. 80.

¹² John L. Esposito and John O, Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1996), p. 16.

¹³ Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1961), p. 12.

¹⁴ Esposito and Voll., p. 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-27. (The concepts outlined in this section are taken from this work. Esposito and Voll provide a more detailed explanation, to include the historical background of these concepts on these pages.)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁷ Asad., p. 14.

¹⁸ Esposito and Voll., p. 28.

¹⁹ Ghabbian., p. 77.

²⁰ Asad., p. 45.

Forces Seeking Equilibrium

The one thing sure about politics is that what goes up comes down and what goes down often comes up.

— Richard M. Nixon¹

Forces in nature constantly seek equilibrium. Egyptian society is no exception to this dictum. Regardless of political frame of reference, the Egyptian populace places a high value on stability. Against this backdrop, Professor Saad Ibrahim of the American University in Cairo characterizes Egypt's current political scene as "a three-sided conflict among an oversized, autocratic state, a persistent Islamic militancy, and the budding forces of civil society and democracy."² Analysis of events involving these three forces reveals a consistent set of relationships whose interactions, although fraught with conflict, tend towards a sense of equilibrium in Egypt's politics. In pursuit of divergent interests and perceived ideal end states, these dynamic forces counterbalance one another and afford only slow movement in the direction of either autocracy or democracy.

The Model

These relationships lend themselves to graphical depiction in a model. The Egyptian polity, or populace, forms the base of the model. It is within the limits of this group that action and reaction occurs. The three political forces germane to the model form the major components of a political "scale." As in Egypt's political scene, the pivot point of the scale is President Mubarak's government and its associated ruling elites. Counterbalancing one another in the scale are the forces for democracy and those promulgated by the Islamists. A set of corrective actions rest atop the scale in a ball.

Should the weight of either the Islamists or those vying for democracy disrupt the balance, the ball rolls to join the heavier force allowing one of its corrective actions to erode the power, or weight, of that force in order to bring the scale back into balance. The ruling elites, of course, determine which corrective action will be used. As with any nation state, external forces also impact the political scene. These are represented by broad arrows pointing into the populace against the counterbalancing forces. This entire political scale is ratcheted to a spiral that runs through its center. As interactions take place and the political “scale” rocks from side to side, the political apparatus moves slowly towards democracy (either Islamic or otherwise) or towards autocracy.

All societies are subject to significant events with the capacity to alter the political scene in a single impact. In the model, such an event would compress the “spiral” from either the bottom or the top, depending on the end state to which Egyptian politics would be driven.

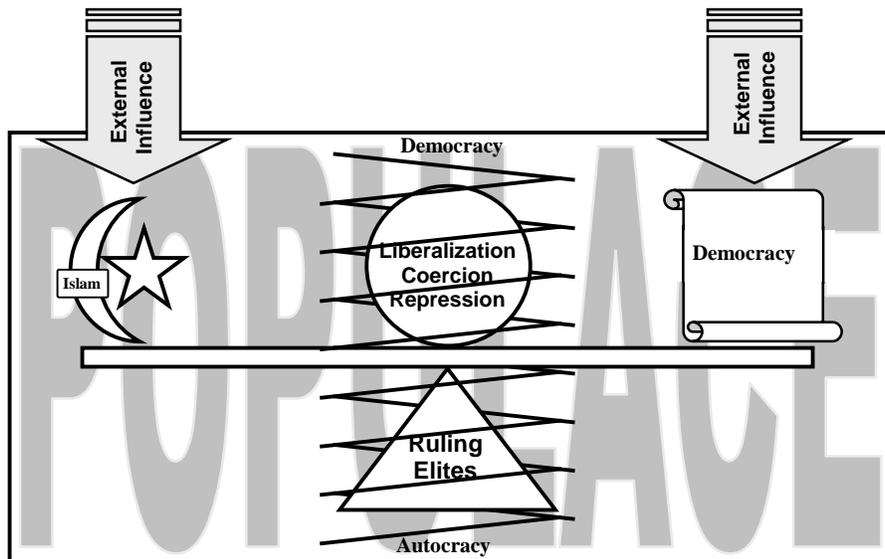


Figure 2: Egyptian Equilibrium Model

The Model in Action

The most effective way to demonstrate the efficacy of any model is to apply it to situations and see how it works. Looking at the most salient interests of Ibrahim's three forces, and how their interaction represents those interests when applied to specific events, the efficacy of this model becomes clear.

Ruling Elites and Autocracy

President Mubarak's government is driven by the same priorities as most Arab regimes. According to analyst Emmanuel Sivan, the government's most important priority is to preserve the regime's own resource base, followed by keeping the ruling elites happy, and finally, to preserve its broad popular base with the populace.³ As the pivot point in the model and the determining authority for what corrective action is required to negate an imbalance in the paradigm, it is important to understand the government's impetus for action.

The most important point to Sivan's priorities is that incumbent Arab governments, to include Mubarak's autocracy, are motivated by self-preservation. The need to placate the ruling elites, which to a large measure makes up that government, is likewise driven by their desire to maintain a position of advantage. Perhaps more than anything else, this quest to retain power is the catalyst for actions and reactions that consistently drive the model to seek equilibrium.

Democratization

As stated earlier in this study, there are two issues critical to democratization in Egypt: (1) creating a climate conducive to fully empowering citizens with the means for a meaningful voice in government and (2) the process of conducting open, free, and fair

elections. Civil and political freedoms, pluralism, and accountability of government to the populace are enabling requirements for these two issues. Of course, their existence would weight the model and tip the balance toward democracy. Egypt's recent experience in dealing with its 1995 elections offers insight into how conflicting forces in the model interact to seek equilibrium. Threatened by forces for democracy, Mubarak's government took corrective action to repress the media, coerce its opposition, and make impossible the government's official accountability to the people.

With elections scheduled for late in 1995, President Mubarak and other powerful officials in Egypt's government assured the populace that elections would be "one-hundred percent fair and honest."⁴ Actions by the Mubarak autocracy were, however, to the contrary. To be open, free, and fair, elections must accommodate freedom to express opposition to the incumbent government. Such opposition existed. A widening gap in wealth between the ruling elites and the masses bolstered perceptions that the Mubarak government was rife with corruption and had lost touch with its populace. As forces for democracy, with their attendant freedom of expression gained momentum, the Mubarak government corrected the imbalance with repression in the form of a new press law.

Enacted in 1995, Press Law 93 made clear that government tolerance for freedom of expression within the media was limited. Criticism of public officials, a common practice in the United States, was summarily squashed. If the government felt that criticisms equated to "smearing" state officials, stiff penalties ensured.⁵ The fact that Egypt's Emergency Law still remained in effect merely added to the Mubarak government's ability to take repressive action by enabling them to bypass the nation's independent judiciary and take cases directly to a military court. Under the provisions of

Egypt's Emergency Law, "suspects" could be held without regard for their normal civil rights, and if convicted had no rights to appeal.

This same legislation allowed the Mubarak regime to coerce the opposition. The Muslim Brotherhood, who had won eight seats to the People's Assembly in the 1984 election and grown to 37 seats in the 1987 election, would only gain a single seat in the 1995 election. In the 1984 and 1987 elections, the Muslim Brotherhood had circumnavigated the Political Parties Law of 1977 (Law 40) which outlawed religious based political parties. They ran as independents in coalition with recognized parties. Using the Emergency Law, before the 1995 election the government arrested and tried a hundred Muslim Brothers, to include some who were running for election.⁶ Goodson and Radwan state that the "continued extension of the Emergency Law has an adverse effect on the political climate during election time, as it allows the government to undertake exceptional procedures which suppress the freedom of speech, movement, and campaigning, and thus in effect prevents non-government candidates from open electioneering."⁷ Such was the case in the 1995 parliamentary election.

With the exception of the elite who benefits from it, Egypt's populace distrusts its election process. The repression and coercion mentioned in the preceding paragraphs are common knowledge. Because these, and other similar practices, were common in previous elections, opposition parties again weighted the balance in favor of democracy. They called for international election monitors to oversee the election process, much as Elklit and Svensson recommend for emerging democracies. Again, the government executed repressive corrective actions. "The government, citing its desire to protect

Egypt's 'internal affairs' from foreign 'meddling,' refused the international-monitors idea and attacked the opposition for trying to undermine Egyptian sovereignty."⁸

Egypt's 1995 elections demonstrate how President Mubarak's autocracy effectively negated civil and political freedoms, pluralism, and government accountability to ensure its self-preservation. In each cited example, it acted to keep the scale in balance.

Islamist Forces

Islamists seek to gain power and create an Islamic state. The difference between moderate and radical Islamists is how long they are willing to wait to achieve their ideal end state and their willingness to use violence in the process. Radical Islamists are impatient and are willing to use violence to achieve their goals. Moderate Islamists make the case that they are willing to work within the system and will accept a secular approach to government. Empowerment of Islamist groups in Algeria and Jordan, however, render such statements suspect. Regardless of approach, the Islamist end state makes this political force a threat to Egypt's current government.

Algeria's provincial and municipal elections in June of 1990 represent President Mubarak's worst fears. Empowered with relatively open, free, and fair elections the Islamists won a resounding victory. Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front won control of 32 of the nation's 48 provinces and 853 seats out of 1,535 on its municipal councils. The Algerian government canceled the elections, voided their results, and banned the Islamic Salvation Front. Political violence has plagued the country ever since.⁹ Validating his feelings on this issue, "Mubarak was quoted in Arabic newspapers as having told former Algerian President Chazli Benjedid not to allow the Islamists to contest in a free election in Algeria."¹⁰

Jordan's empowered Islamists exacerbate these fears when they make clear that although patient and peaceful in approach, they believe in democracy as a strategy to bring about an Islamic state. In essence, they state that they will use democracy as a means to an Islamic solution: a non-secular solution in its ideal form.¹¹

How then does all this apply to the model? Given this background and that Islamists "want to shift the frame of reference in the public realm to one in which Islam, in its various interpretations, is a major shaping force,"¹² Egypt's government will react to all Islamist attempts to gain ground as a force in society. Threatened by the growth of Islamist political influence through professional associations or through elections supported by the system of Islamic mosques, President Mubarak's government again moved in accordance with the model to repress and coerce Islamist forces challenging the balance.

The discourse in the previous section concerning Mubarak's continuation of the Emergency Law and its use to coerce Islamist candidates in elections need not be repeated. These corrective actions were primarily directed against Islamists candidates for election. No doubt, however, they had a chilling effect on any other would-be opposition groups.

Islamists influence in professional associations weighted the model. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, moderate Islamists quietly gained positions of influence in professional organizations, called syndicates, representing respected groups like lawyers, doctors, and engineers. By 1993 they had become the leaders of these groups. Respected organizations, whose positions are received by the public with respect and credibility, this disturbed the ruling elites. When these syndicates became vocal on human rights issues

and the equitable application of Egyptian law in 1993, the equilibrium balance tipped. Corrective action was swift. President Mubarak and the ruling elites enacted the Syndicate Law (Law 100) in May 1993.¹³

Interestingly enough, they named this legislation the *Law to Guarantee Democracy within the Professional Syndicates*. In order to counteract the Islamists influence in the syndicates, the new law required a minimum of 50% participation by the members of a syndicate when electing its leadership. If the group fell short of this requirement the first round, it had to have 33% in the second round. If neither requirement was met, the elections were void and leadership of the syndicate would defer to the parliament, a political body dominated by Mubarak's National Democratic Party.¹⁴ Contrary to its name, the legislation precluded, rather than supported, democratic action. Despite significant opposition, to include demonstrations, Law 100 stands. Accordingly, the balance moved back to at least a pseudo equilibrium.

Fearing what appeared to be the promulgation of Islamist ideology among its economically depressed populace, in October of 1992 the Mubarak regime mandated government control of sermons. Its ministry of religious affairs was to review and approve all sermons delivered in state-controlled mosques. Going one step further, the building of new private mosques was all but outlawed and eliminated.¹⁵

In every case of increased influence by Islamists, when the government felt threatened (i.e. when the balance in the model tipped to the Islamists side), it took decisive corrective action. Although multiple and simultaneously acting political forces keep the scale in motion, Ibrahim's three conflicting forces always tend to counterbalance one another and seek a sense of stability.

The Populace – A Force for Liberalization

At this point, one must ask why the populace does not revolt or react in a more violent or vocal manner to obvious coercion and repression. Analysts Goodson and Radwan characterize Egypt's political culture in a way that explains this lack of action.

They characterize it as follows:

The family, educational system, and religious establishment do not focus on direct political socialization but rather stress ethical and nationalist-oriented values, all within the framework of submission to authority. Moreover, the underground Islamist movement [less its radical component], although it protests against and challenges the government, does not reject the notion of the dominance of legitimate authority and the limitation of democracy.¹⁶

This “submissive” populace does, however, occasionally tip the equilibrium scale. When it does so, the populace becomes a force for democracy. For example, when dissatisfaction over the 1995 parliamentary election threatened the Mubarak regime's popular base of support and weighted the balance on the side of democracy, he took corrective action. He liberalized by executing a cabinet shuffle to reorient the “government's political stance toward alleviating the severe economic conditions of the masses, instead of the previous focus on the financial measures of structural adjustments.”¹⁷

The same was true when in May of 1990 when under pressure from the masses, Egypt's independent Judiciary ruled the 1987 parliamentary elections unconstitutional. The government subsequently dissolved in October of that year – an act of liberalization. Likewise, in June 1996 President Mubarak rescinded the previously discussed Press Law in order to appease the masses and raise national morale – another liberalization action.¹⁸

Although infrequent, every time Mubarak's regime loosens control to the populace, it is a slight movement along the model's "spiral" towards democracy. Conversely, every time the government decides in favor of itself over the desires of the people, it risks moving down that "spiral" towards a stronger autocracy.

External Forces

Islamists movements and forces for democracy both receive external support in Egypt. Whether focused on improving the side of the Islamist or that of democracy, external forces generally work against autocracy and in favor of democracy, albeit an Islamic democracy in the case of Islamist support.

According to Esposito and Voll, Islamist movements in Egypt are the recipients of support from countries like Libya, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Sudan. In some cases this support is of a peaceful financial nature that finds its way into privately built mosques and needed social programs. In other instances, such as Iran and Sudan, it takes the form of limited financial support and training for extremist organizations.¹⁹ In either case, the result is to promulgate ideas that challenge the existing government, thereby working towards empowerment for the Islamist cause.

Support for democracy, or its ideals, comes from a number of external sources also. The United States has provided Egypt with \$17.5 billion in economic aid between 1975 and 1997.²⁰ The United States Agency for International Development provided some of this aid as part of a concerted effort to build an infrastructure in Egypt that would support privatization and economic growth – accepted prerequisites for full-fledged democracy. Additionally, both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have provided aid. In all cases, these organizations are direct proponents for democracy or indirect

supporters of it based on the principals they support like human rights. As with the external influence bolstering Islamists, this support pushes the scale so that Mubarak must either correct negatively with repression and coercion, or positively through liberalization. Because of the regime's need for self-preservation, movements within the model are carefully calculated to sustain equilibrium. Their mobility on the model's bipolar "spiral" is slow. The cumulative effect of external forces with those from Egypt's populace is movement toward democracy.

Notes

¹ Quoted in: Earl Mazo, "Richard Nixon: A Political and Personal Portrait," Chapter 17 (1959), *The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* (Columbia University Press, 1993).

² Saad E. Ibrahim, "Reform and Frustration in Egypt," *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 7, Number 4 (October 1996): p. 125.

³ Emmanuel Sivan, "Constraints & Opportunities in the Arab World," *Journal of Democracy* 8, Number 2 (April 1997): p. 103.

⁴ Ibrahim, p. 133.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Larry P. Goodson and Soha Radwan, "Democratization in Egypt in the 1990s: Stagnant, or Merely Stalled?" *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19, Issue 1 (Winter 1997): np.

⁸ Ibrahim, p. 133.

⁹ "Democracy in the Desert." *The World and I* 10, Issue (January 1995): np.

¹⁰ Najib Ghabbian, *Democratization and the Islamist Challenge in the Arab World* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1997), p. 101.

¹¹ Glenn E. Robinson, "Can Islamists be Democrats? The Case of Jordan," *Middle East Journal* 15, Issue 3 (Summer 1997): p. 379.

¹² Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge), p. 59.

¹³ John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1996), p. 185.

¹⁴ Cassandra, "The Impending Crisis in Egypt," *Middle East Journal* 49, Issue 1 (Winter 1995): p. 187.

¹⁵ Esposito and Voll, p. 182.

¹⁶ Goodson and Radwan, np.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Cassandra, p. 133.

¹⁹ Esposito and Voll, p. 184.

Notes

²⁰ Ambassador Edward S. Walker, Jr., “United States-Egyptian Relations: Strengthening our Partnership,” *SAIS Review: A Journal of International Affairs* XVII, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1997): 156.

Conclusion

Democratization is essential for internal stability: That is the lesson Hosni Mubarak has drawn from Egypt's recent history. And the stability of Egypt is his primary concern.

— Unknown
*New York Times Magazine*¹

Egypt is strategically important to the United States for a number of reasons, not the least of which are its leadership role in the Arab world, geographical placement in the region, and political cooperation with stated objectives in President Clinton's national security strategy: namely democratization and regional stability. As all sovereign nations, President Mubarak and his government chart Egypt's course in executing this cooperative strategy. That course undoubtedly is different than diplomats in the United States may choose. Nonetheless, building a partnership with a regional power from a different culture requires tolerance and understanding on both sides.

Egypt's political scene is marked by three often competing forces – autocracy, democratization, and Islamist resurgence. Past behavior is an indicator of future action. As such, the interaction of these forces in the Egyptian Equilibrium Model (Figure 2) is not only explanatory, but also predictive. Where then is Egypt headed politically? As each force vies for control and empowerment in the government, coercion, repression, human rights violations, violence, and liberalization will continue. President Mubarak and his ruling elites will continue to protect their political power, while forces for both democracy and an Islamist solution maneuver for political power in an equilibrium seeking triad. The net result is the continuation of Egypt's political "status quo" – with

very slow, if any, real progress toward democracy through infrequent liberalization actions.

Of course, this means that the United States will have to continue to support Egypt's current government. It is a regime that meets President Clinton's goal of regional stability and it is for the most part, friendly to the democratic West. The price for this regional stability is tolerance of an abridgement of civil and human rights that are counter to America's committed stance. As Ambassador Walker states, "irritations in our relations [with Egypt] will consequently multiply, but our fundamental and mutual interests in peace and regional stability will continue to sustain the basic fabric of our relations."²

Notes

¹ Judith Miller, "Mubarak's Venture in Democracy." *New York Times Magazine*, 27 May 1984, p. 31.

² Ambassador Edward S. Walker, Jr., "United States-Egyptian Relations: Strengthening our Partnership," *SAIS Review: A Journal of International Affairs* XVII, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1997): 162.

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