

« Washington might regret Hosni Moubarak's departure »

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By
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What could the consequences be on relations between Cairo and Washington following Hosni Moubarak's decision to leave after the presidential election?

Don't be mistaken: the present Egyptian government's authority is already shattered. At this stage, it would be crazy to imagine that it could have seven months to prepare for the next election. By wishing for an "organized transition leading towards a government which can meet the Egyptian people's aspirations ", Washington implicitly buried Hosni Moubarak's government, after supporting it and using it as an instrument for American foreign policy for thirty years. The problem is that these "aspirations" are totally unknown today and will not necessarily suit American interests. Too often we forget that the lack of support from President Jimmy Carter for the Shah of Iran not only precipitated his fall in 1979, but also favoured the rise to power of Ayatollah Khomeyni. Within a few months, the moderates who had forced the Shah into exile were eliminated by the radical Islamists. In this same way, Washington might soon regret Hosni Moubarak. When discussing the Egyptian people's justifiable aspirations, we necessarily legitimize the opposition. The White House's wisest attitude would have been to keep quiet and let the Egyptians choose their future.

What type of government can reasonably succeed Hosni Moubarak's in case of an acceleration of the "transition"?

The future Egyptian government, whatever it is, will necessarily be extremely nationalist and hostile to the United States and Israel. Because, behind the disagreement and the call for democracy, above all there is the humiliation of the Egyptian people, who blame Moubarak for being Washington's "puppet". This feeling of humiliation is strengthened by the fact that scarcely more than 20 % of the 15 to 24 year olds are employed today, in spite of the annual average growth rate of 7 % in the Egyptian economy during the past years. If the army, which is the only force that could prevent an evaporation of the state system, happened to collapse, it could have

consequences as catastrophic as in Iraq. Obviously, it is very surprising to see that the Egyptian security forces did not do more to keep what is the key to the system.

Is there not a disconcerting parallelism between Washington's embarrassment towards the Mubarak government and France's attitude during the dispute over President Ben Ali's regime in Tunisia?

There is a big difference between the two countries: Mubarak's son, Gamal, convinced his father to start opening the economy to the outside, while Ben Ali's regime was much more uncommunicative. The most surprising is the speed with which the Ben Ali government collapsed, three weeks, while it took about one year for the Iranian opposition to bring the Shah down and replace him with Khomeini.

What can be the economic consequences of a long-lasting Egyptian crisis?

In itself, the Egyptian economy does not have a huge impact on the outside. The main question is about the impact on oil and natural gas prices in case of long-lasting instability. But it is above all the risk of contamination to petroleum exporting countries, and in particular Syria, that could become alarming. Although the Assad dynasty seems well established, there are demographic risks of an upheaval, with approximately 60 % of the Syrian people under 20 years of age. So far, the American administration has not seemed to fully assess all the implications of the fall of Mubarak's government.

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