

***STORM WARNINGS: THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD  
AND EGYPT'S FUTURE***



**A Simon Wiesenthal Center Report**  
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**THREE DAYS BEFORE THE FIRST ROUND OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS, 5,000 PROTESTORS RALLY IN FRONT OF CAIRO'S PRESTIGIOUS AL-ALZHAR MOSQUE TO JOIN "BATTLE AGAINST JERUSALEM'S JUDAIZATION" AND "ONE DAY, KILL ALL THE JEWS"<sup>1</sup>:**

“Speakers at the event delivered impassioned, hateful speeches against Israel, slamming the ‘Zionist occupiers’ and the ‘treacherous Jews’. Upon leaving the rally, worshippers were given small flags, with Egypt's flag on one side and the Palestinian flag on the other, as well as maps of Jerusalem's Old City detailing where ‘Zionists are aiming to change Jerusalem's Muslim character’. Spiritual leader Dr. Ahmed al-Tayeb charged in his speech that to this day Jews everywhere in the world are seeking to prevent Islamic and Egyptian unity: ‘In order to build Egypt, we must be one. Politics is insufficient. Faith in Allah is the basis for everything. The al-Aqsa Mosque is currently under an offensive by the Jews . . . we shall not allow the Zionists to Judaize al-Quds. We are telling Israel and Europe that we shall not allow even one stone to be moved there.” Muslim Brotherhood spokesmen, as well as Palestinian guest speakers, made explicit calls for Jihad and for liberating the whole of Palestine. Time and again, a Koran quote vowing that ‘one day we shall kill all the Jews’ was uttered at the site. . . . Throughout the event, Muslim Brotherhood activists chanted: ‘Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv, judgment day has come.’”

**EGYPTIAN CLERIC TAWFIQ AL-AFNI LEAD PRO-AL-QAEDA DEMONSTRATION IN TAHRIR SQUARE, THREATENING AMERICA AND THE JEWS<sup>2</sup>:**

“First of all, Islamic law is the only source for legislation. . . I would like to say to the whole world that the Prophet Muhammad prophesized that the return of Islam was inevitable. . . . I say to the people who fear Islam: Are you thieves that should fear the chopping off of hands? Are you alcohol-drinkers that you should fear being flogged? . . . Sheikh Osama bin Laden is a man who waged Jihad for the sake of Allah, and we pray that Allah will unite us with him and the martyrs in Paradise. My brothers, in Islam, we say with great pride that we adhere to the Jihad for the sake of Allah. . . . We say to infidel America: By Allah, if you contemplate coming to Egypt, you will encounter men who love death more than you Americans love life. Crowd: Allah Akbar. . . . I say to the Jews: if you contemplate harming Egypt or its Muslim people, you will encounter men who seek death more than you seek life. Crowd: Allah Akbar. . . . Man in crowd: Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews, the army of Muhammad is here. Crowd: Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews, the army of Muhammad is here . . . Tawfiq Al-Afni: Oh Allah, grant us martyrdom for your sake. Crowd: Amen. Tawfiq Al-Afni: Say with me: [The revolution] is Islamic, Islamic. Crowd: Islamic, Islamic . . . Tawfiq Al-Afni: It is Islamic, Islamic . . . Tawfiq Al-Afni: It is neither Eastern nor Western . . . Crowd: Neither Eastern nor Western . . . Tawfiq Al-Afni: It is neither Jewish nor American . . . Crowd: Neither Jewish nor American . . . Tawfiq Al-Afni: You return, oh Islam . . . Crowd: You return, oh Islam . . . Tawfiq Al-Afni: You will rule, oh Koran . . . .”

**EGYPTIAN POLITICIANS ON ISRAEL AND CURRENT CRISIS<sup>3</sup>:**

**Osam Sultan, Deputy Head of the Egyptian Al-Wasat Party:** “Israeli evil is behind this (new Egyptian social unrest).”

**Majdi Hussein, Secretary-General of the Egyptian Amal Party:** “Although the relations between Egypt and Israel have been undermined after the collapse of Mubarak's regime, we are still unsatisfied with these conditions and serious efforts will be made after the elections to cut relations with the Zionist enemy completely.”

## **Diverse Voices on Egypt's Future: Birth or Death Knell of Democracy?**

**Journalist Robin Wright Naively Equates Islamists with Jeffersonians:** “Many Muslims share conservative values even as they push for freedoms. The right to human dignity, Muslims believe, is God-given—a view shared by Thomas Jefferson and engraved on the walls of his memorial.”<sup>4</sup>

**Robert Satloff of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy Warns About the Muslim Brotherhood:** “A Brotherhood-led, -guided, or -inspired government of Egypt would not meet this [democratic] test.”<sup>5</sup>

**The Committee to Protect Journalists on the Egyptian Army's Problematic Role:** “The military, and particularly the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, continues to employ censorship, intimidation, and politicized legal proceedings to cow critical journalists into silence.”<sup>6</sup>

**Anti-Israel Demonstrators Threaten Sinai Gas Pipeline:** “If the government won't cut it off, the people will.”<sup>7</sup> The pipeline was bombed again hours before the November 28, elections.

**Abdulhameed Barakat, Secretary-General of the Islamist-Leaning Labor Party, Threatens Israel and the U.S.:** “We fought against the Camp David Accords, we fought against the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and we'll keep fighting . . . The United States discriminates against the weak and the poor, while Israel, the invader, can do anything without American criticism.”<sup>8</sup>

**Ramez Atallah, Protestant head of Egypt's Bible Society:** “My fear is that the new regime, if it's an Islamic regime, will be merciless in its religious orientation and won't allow us even to breathe. They will find a way to close my bookshop. They won't allow me to put billboards on the highway anymore. They won't allow me to put ads in the newspapers. They will accuse me of proselytizing. With the Mubarak regime I was fine because I was running a private business selling Bibles rather than proselytizing . . . And the Muslim Brotherhood has slowly been infiltrating the army like they've infiltrated the unions. They've worked at it for thirty years and they've been very careful to get where they are. They've been planning for this day for a long time. And unlike Nelson Mandela, when he came out of prison and forgave people who worked with the former government, the Brotherhood wants revenge.”<sup>9</sup>

**John R. Bradley, *Inside Egypt* (2009):** “If Washington does decide to listen to the voices of policy analysts inside the Beltway . . . to cultivate the Muslim Brotherhood, it will not so much mark a ‘triumph of Islam’ but the final death knell for Egypt's deep-set democratic and pluralist traditions, with devastating consequences for the wider region.”<sup>10</sup>

**Mideast Expert Lee Smith on Prospects of Egyptian-Israeli War:** “[Though] the rational calculation is that Cairo understands it would lose that war as well as the \$2 billion dollars in US aid, . . . [the] problem is that very little we have seen in Egypt over the last six months is based on rational self-interest . . . . The Muslim Brotherhood is a problem for us because the organization is anti-Western at its core. Is it more

moderate than Al Qaeda? Yes, a Muslim Brotherhood government commanding a real Arab army, like Egypt's, with tanks, artillery, an air force and navy. Does anyone think that the late Bin Laden's jihadis are more dangerous than that?"<sup>11</sup>

## Introduction

The stakes could not be higher.

As “The Arab Spring” gives way to a summer and fall of discontent, Egypt, convulsed by new violent demonstrations, faces fateful parliamentary elections—from which the theocratic Muslim Brotherhood will likely emerge as the dominant force—followed by a presidential election, probably in June, 2012, to choose the successor to longtime strongman Hosni Mubarak.<sup>12</sup>

Egypt is a country that exports no oil but imports most of its food, whose population, in a mere thirty years, has more than doubled to 80 million. Its illiteracy and youth unemployment rates are both sky high.<sup>13</sup> Will the largest Arab country emerge a few years from now, as CNN’s Fareed Zakaria optimistically predicted in the heady days last April, “like [pluralist] Indonesia [looks] today”?<sup>14</sup> Or will Egypt instead look like a Sunni version of the Ayatollah Khomeini’s Iran, tilting the entire Middle East in an anti-western direction and possibly placing it on a military collision course with Israel? In *Foreign Affairs*, Marc Lynch tries his best to still be optimistic by pleading: “Don’t Panic!”<sup>15</sup> The need for realism and vigilance in Washington and European capitals as well as Jerusalem are great while the margin for hope is, unfortunately, small.

In May in *The Times of London*, President Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron pledged to work against repressive regimes in the Middle East, likening the effort to free Arab people from authoritarianism to the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall in the 1980s. “We will stand with those who want to bring light into dark, support those who seek freedom in place of repression, aid those laying the building blocks of democracy,” they wrote. Yet in the Cold War everyone knew who the enemy was, while the President and Prime Minister did little to define specifically the nature of the twenty-first century Mideast threat (beyond the removal of Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi and the recasting as a bad guy of Syria’s “reformer” Bashar el Assad).<sup>16</sup>

The question, who are our allies, who are our adversaries? — became glaring on the eve of July 4th when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton embraced official contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood despite its long-stated global goals of imposing Shariah law, not only on Egypt but ultimately the U.S. and Europe, while unwaveringly pursuing the destruction of Israel.<sup>17</sup>

The Obama Administration tried to portray this policy shift as an incremental change toward only “limited contacts,” but an expert on the Islamic world, Ammar Ali Hassan, told the *Associated Press*: “The Brotherhood will likely try to float ‘conditions’ or ‘reservations’ on any dialogue to avoid a perception that it is allowing the U.S. to meddle in Egypt’s internal affairs.” Predicting that the Brotherhood will in the end become the dominant player in Egyptian politics, Hassan said the U.S. move toward recognition would speed this outcome by demoralizing the opposition: “Now the Muslim Brotherhood will not have to worry [about] moving forward toward taking over power.”<sup>18</sup>

William Taylor, the State Department's director of its new office for Middle East Transitions, announced: "We don't do party support. What we do is party training [in Egypt]... And we do it to whoever comes"—including Islamist parties with anti-Western agendas. Secretary of State Clinton blithely declared that "given the changing political landscape in Egypt . . . it is in the interests of the United States to engage with all parties that are peaceful, and committed to nonviolence, that intend to compete for the parliament and the presidency," but she ignored the warning from Robert Satloff of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Satloff writes that "a Brotherhood-led, -guided, -or inspired government of Egypt would not meet this test" of a democratic polity compatible with American values and interests.<sup>19</sup>

Based on a leap of faith that the Brotherhood's democratic protestations can be believed and a fatalistic conclusion that the U.S. has no alternative, the new official American view is that Muslim Brotherhood is part, not of Egypt's problem, but of its potential solution. The impact of this thinking on events on the ground throughout the Middle East has already begun, but may not ultimately be in the peaceful, democratic direction desired by policymakers in Washington.

Among the possible early casualties: Israel's peace treaty with Egypt. Since Mubarak's ouster, Israel has experienced a lethal cross-border attack on Eilat from Sinai, the smuggling of surface-to-air missiles from Libya through Egypt to Hamas, the assault on Israel's Cairo Embassy, trumped-up spying charges against Israeli citizens, and hints from Egypt's transitional government that it may not be bound by the peace treaty.<sup>20</sup>

### **From Protests to Paralysis**

After the January **Facebook Revolution**, protests of over a million in Cairo's Tahrir ("Liberation") Square were institutionalized in outpourings of tens of thousands on Friday "days of rage." **Facebook** remains a key ingredient fueling youthful, educated demonstrators, many of whom come and go in accordance with the seemingly mysterious rhythm of "flash mobs." Relations between Egypt's interim military-caretaker Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and the protestors have degenerated into an ugly and deadly comedy of errors. The military even tried unsuccessfully to use **Facebook** to poll the crowds about the best hour to impose a curfew. More typically, female protestors have been discouraged with threats that they will be subject to "virginity tests," while 12,000 people have been tried in military courts, compared to 2,000 in thirty years under Mubarak.<sup>21</sup>

Five months after Mubarak's February resignation, most observers agreed about a loss of momentum and heightened malaise among protestors unable to move beyond democratic slogans and criticism of military crowd control to enunciating a specific program of political and economic reforms. Jeffrey Fleishman in the *Los Angeles Times* reported: "Sensing the revolution that overthrew President Hosni Mubarak is slipping from their grasp, activists and opposition groups are pressuring the ruling military council to postpone Egypt's elections in September amid fears that Islamists and members of the former regime will gain too much power . . . Activists and liberals argue on talk shows for keeping the revolution vigorous and pure. But the sound of unity that once echoed through Tahrir Square has splintered into a discordant mix of power plays and self-interests."<sup>22</sup>

As Egypt's parliamentary elections were postponed until late November, grassroots sentiment in a village 45 miles north of Cairo was sampled by Ernesto London of the *Washington Post*: "As Egypt confronts a surge in crime, an anemic economy, an outbreak of deadly religious violence and other aftershocks of the revolution, many here are feeling vindicated. 'The old days were better', said Sabeen Mursi, 30, sitting in front of a wooden cart of fruit and vegetables that attracted few customers. 'Even though there was no money, people would take care of each other. We would all find something to eat at the end of the day. Today, no one cares about one another'."<sup>23</sup>

Egypt is disintegrating socially and economically. It "is bust, . . . People don't feel secure, they're buying guns." This was the dour assessment offered in May by Mohamed ElBaradei, former International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief and current presidential candidate.<sup>24</sup> Food rations were the only alternative to starvation for a population living on average on less than \$2 per day. Matthew Duss of the Center for American Progress' Middle East Progress think tank offered one of the few optimistic economic assessments, echoing Secretary of State Clinton and the Obama Administration.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Brotherhood's Stealth Strategy**

The Muslim Brotherhood has cunningly positioned itself to maximize political advantage while minimizing the risks of a major loss in Egypt's imminent elections. A strategy of creeping Islamization—emphasizing democratic rhetoric and downplaying theocratic ideology—was urged on the Brotherhood when Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan during his triumphant visit to North Africa and Egypt. This was the model successfully employed in Tunisia's recent elections by Rachid el-Ghannouchi of the Islamist al-Nahda Party who projected a new "moderate" image without repudiating his earlier declarations about "waging unceasing war against the Americans."<sup>26</sup>

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood continues to insist that it will neither seek a parliamentary majority nor field its own presidential candidate. Stating that it would be happy with 30 percent of parliamentary seats, it has even expelled, Abdel Moneim Abul Futuh, a prominent member who broke ranks by declaring his independent candidacy for president. The Brotherhood claims it doesn't want to be blamed for either "Algerian overreach" where an Islamist victory triggered by civil war, or an Islamist coup like Hamas' in Gaza that intensified Palestinian divisions and international backlash.<sup>27</sup>

### **Behind-the-Scenes**

It's a different story behind-the-scenes.

Legalized for the first time since 1954 as the "Freedom and Justice Party," the Brotherhood is juggling its new moderate image against its continuing track record of violence and repression. Unwilling to tolerate dissent within its own ranks, the Brotherhood is systematically expelling its more outspoken younger members who now prefer Islam Lofty's more moderate "Egyptian Current" political movement.<sup>28</sup>

Brotherhood true believers voice disdain for "liberals and secularists [who] just talk on TV and in the media, in their air conditioning," and spend more time on **Facebook** than in the streets. Trying to live

down their reputation as “ear cutters and shrine destroyers”, the Brotherhood hard core emphasizes the formation of neighborhood “popular committees” that distribute cooking gas and bread, on the model of the politically potent charity networks set up by Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. By combining Internet technology with old-time “political soup kitchens” like those pioneered by both Al Capone and Adolf Hitler, the Brotherhood has forged effective political tools with which to compete in the twenty-first century.<sup>29</sup>

At the grassroots, the Brotherhood also avoids lofty rhetoric, pushing instead an easily understood politics of revenge, aimed not only at former President Mubarak but at Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the man they disparage as “the Field Marshal.” Tantawi was Mubarak’s former Defense Minister who now heads the governing Army Council. The relatives of the 840 people killed in the eighteen days of protests that toppled Mubarak still want blood—with Brotherhood banners reading “Punishment of Killers of Martyrs” promise to give them.<sup>30</sup>

While expelling its own moderates, the Brotherhood has also reached out to Egypt’s theologically ultra-reactionary Salafi movement. The Brotherhood, a long time theological rival of the Salafis, took the extraordinary step after a Salafi attack on a Sufi shrine of brokering a Salafi-Sufi reconciliation summit. Breaking with their own tradition, the Salafis—whom a State Department cable revealed by **Wikileaks** characterized in terms of “susceptibility to radicalism and jihadi ideas”—have now entered the political arena. The Brotherhood-Salafi coalition was largely responsible for the “yes vote” for hastily ratifying a new Egyptian Constitution and holding September elections (subsequently postponed to November), which liberals and secularists opposed for not providing sufficient time for them to organize. The Salafis, who have their own network of a dozen satellite TV stations, used **Facebook** postings to bring into Cairo, 70,000 followers on sex-segregated buses for a political rally. A **YouTube** video went viral of Salafi leader Sheikh Hussein Yaqoub boasting about a “conquest of the ballot boxes.”<sup>31</sup>

### **The Brothers and the Army**

Finally, the ruling Military Council is involved with the Brotherhood in a political triangle, the third player in which are the demoralized liberal reformers. Far from being liberal, the Council is reverting to Mubarak era punishment of bloggers accused of “slandering Islam,” criticizing the Army, or friendliness toward Israel. There has been a freeze imposed on licenses for new private satellite television stations and a crackdown on channels alleged to incite violence and destabilize the country. One of the country’s leading newspapers, *Sout Al-Ouma*, was confiscated. The media has been banned from reporting the testimony at Mubarak’s trial of the Army chief Tantawi, who is using government media to promote his own ambitions. The hated state of emergency has been extended, election laws drafted favoring wealthy incumbents and holdovers from the old regime, and the presidential election was postponed until at least mid-2012. And a driver of an army truck joined Islamist thugs in crushing Coptic Christians demonstrating in Cairo for their rights.<sup>32</sup>

The Military Council’s relationship with the Brotherhood suggest an overriding desire to hold onto power in a post-Mubarak era, either through military rule or, if necessary, power-sharing with the Islamists. On

the one hand, the Council has ruled against sectarian campaign slogans including the Brotherhood's "Islam is the solution." But on the other hand, the Council has been accused of conspiring behind-the-scenes with the Brotherhood to control the country after the elections. The Wafd party newspaper reported such a secret deal, causing a military prosecutor to call in the newspaper editor and reporter for questioning.<sup>33</sup>

In the weeks before the first-round, November 28 parliamentary elections, the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated it was not going to be co-opted by the Army. In February, it had held back from full participation in the demonstrations that toppled Mubarak, but in November it took the lead initially in the new violent demonstrations—death toll: an estimated 44—that shook the military "caretaker" regime to its foundations and forced the resignation of Egypt's cabinet. Then the Brotherhood negotiated with the ruling junta, and again drew back its participation in demonstrations. As a convulsed Egypt headed into new elections, the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party had to walk a fine line between claiming credit for the new political protests and being blamed for the resulting social unrest, yet seemed to be positioning itself well to win a majority in collaboration with the even more extreme Islamist parties.<sup>34</sup>

The alignment strongly favoring the Islamists going into the November 28 elections involved the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) as the dominant force behind the Democratic Alliance for Egypt Coalition. Formed in June as a 40-member umbrella group with the Salafists to the right of the Brothers and plethora of secular liberal-radical parties to the left, the Coalition before the election had lost more than half its party members due to defections on both ends of the spectrum. The Salafists formed their own Islamic Bloc. The secular parties on the left ran under two new coalitions: the youth-oriented Completing the Revolution Alliance and the Egyptian Bloc. The Democratic Alliance for Egypt was reduced to little more than a useful front group for the Brotherhood. It ran on the slogan "We Bear Good for All of Egypt" because the Army had banned the Brotherhood slogan: "Islam is the Solution."<sup>35</sup>

All told, there are serious doubts that the current "democratic" political process—controlled by the Army and skillfully exploited by the Brotherhood—will produce a freer Egypt than that presided over by "the last pharaoh"—Hosni Mubarak.

## **Ominous Indicators**

The public opinion polls of the Egyptians do not tell a comforting story.

Despite the Obama Administration's abandonment of Mubarak, its offer of a new \$2 billion economic aid package, and a tank deal with the Egyptian Army, there have not been poll dividends for the United States among Egyptians. The percentage of Egyptians with a favorable attitude toward America climbed from 9 percent during the Bush Administration to 30 percent during the first year of the Obama Administration—but now it is down to 5 percent. Another poll puts the U.S. favorability rating at 18 percent. Only 22 percent of Egyptians credit the U.S. with a positive role in Egypt's transition to democracy. Obama personally—with a 12 percent favorability rating—is less popular than the late Osama bin Laden.<sup>36</sup>

Secular parties enjoyed 25 percent support, compared to 19 percent for Islamist parties, but the Muslim Brotherhood—the best organized to make gains in the upcoming elections—had respectable 31 percent approval rating in one poll. In an earlier poll, it had a very high 75 percent favorable rating, behind the Army at 90 percent.<sup>37</sup>

It must also be remembered that the Brotherhood’s traditional agenda of intolerance appeals to the beliefs (or prejudices) of tens of millions more Egyptians, according to polls showing 80 percent support for death sentences for homosexuals, adulterers, and Muslims who convert to another religion.

(There is scant direct Egyptian polling data about Jews, but we know that in Gaza and the West Bank 73 percent of Palestinians agreed with a quote from the Article 7 in the Hamas Charter, about the need to kill Jews: “The Day of Judgment will not come about until Moslems fight Jews and kill them. Then, the Jews will hide behind rocks and trees, and the rocks and trees will cry out: ‘O Moslem, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come and kill him’.” Hamas is a Palestinian offshoot of the Egyptian Brotherhood.<sup>38</sup>)

It’s been reported that Egypt’s new fringe Nazi Party—which was outlawed under Mubarak—is now using **Facebook** to attract followers. Probably more significant, Ezz El-Arab, vicre chairman of Wafd, Egypt’s largest secular party, said at a Budapest Conference: “The Holocaust is a lie. . . . The Jews under German occupation were 2.4 million. So if they were all exterminated, where does the remaining 3.6 million come from?”<sup>39</sup>

## **Polling About Israel**

Regarding Israel, polling data is contradictory. On the one hand, 67 percent of Egyptians indicate their country should maintain its peace treaty with Israel, compared to 11 percent who want the deal scrapped, according to a poll by the government’s Information and Decision Support Center. On the other hand, a poll by the highly respected Pew Research Center found 54 percent of Egyptians favor annulling the peace treaty, while only 36 percent would maintain it. If one has to choose, the Pew poll is probably more accurate.<sup>40</sup>

What is clear is that Egypt—from top down and bottom up—has become even more awash with anti-American, anti-Israel and anti-Jewish conspiratorial ideology and actions than it was under Sadat or Mubarak. Three quarters of Egyptians—more than in any other Muslim country—believe that the U.S. (and/or possibly Israel) was responsible for the 9/11 attacks. “Mossad plotted to harm Egyptian fertility” was the headline in the official government newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, when Egyptian authorities announced they were planning to indict in absentia Israeli, Ofir Harrari, accused in a plot to sell hair products that would render Egyptians infertile. Blogger Jeffrey Goldberg reports the following: “Presidential candidate Tawfiq Okasha, speaking on the television station he owns, recently said, ‘Not all the Jews in the world are evil. You may ask: Tawfiq, what is the ratio? The ratio is 60-40. Sixty percent are evil to varying degrees, all the way to a level that words cannot describe, while 40 percent are not evil’. . . . Okasha did concede that, while even among the 40 percent of non-evil Jews there is only one in a million who is

blameless, it is possible to ‘coexist’ with this sort of Jew because they ‘do not betray, conspire, extort or view others as Gentiles’.”<sup>41</sup>

Ilan Grapel, a dual U.S. and Israeli citizen, had to be freed in a hostage swap after the Egyptian authorities arrested him on equally bizarre espionage charges. And Egyptian Ambassador to the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Othman, apparently spoke for many in Egyptian governing circles when he charged that Israel is plotting to retake control of the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>42</sup>

### **Egypt’s Coptic Christian Litmus Test**

Coptic Christians—who constituted as much as a quarter of Egypt’s population as late as 1700—now make up a minimum of two million and perhaps as many as eight million. Statistics are unreliable. Following the virtual disappearance of Egyptian Jewry, the Copts retreated from public life in response to complementary movements after 1970 to Islamize Egyptian society—from the top down by the Mubarak regime and the bottom up by the Muslim Brotherhood. Grassroots violence aimed primarily at Coptic churches peaked in the 1970s and 1980s, but then subsided—only to spike again around 2005 as the election of Islamists to 25 percent of Egyptian parliamentary seats inspired new efforts to impose religious uniformity and reduce Christian Egyptians to second-class citizenship.<sup>43</sup>

After uniting with Muslims to topple the Mubarak regime, the Coptics quickly experienced betrayal, despite rhetorical assurances to the contrary from the Islamist high command. On New Year’s Eve, 24 Christians were killed and 100 injured in a church bombing in Alexandria. In the province of Soul, 20 miles south of Cairo, an entire Christian village had to be evacuated. Then, sparked by reconstruction work on 100 year-old St. George’s Church in Central Egypt, a violent protest by Salafists threatened “to cut to pieces” a local priest, Father George Thabet. Security forces took five hours to show up and whisk the priest away. Young worshippers remained barricaded in the church to prevent it from being burned. In Southern Egypt, the Islamists staged an uprising to force the ruling military to rescind its appointment of a Christian as a provincial governor.<sup>44</sup>

In June, *The Wall Street Journal* carried an account of the plight Ayman Anwar Mitri, a Coptic Christian. His apartment—ostensibly because he rented it to Muslim “loose women”—was torched. When he returned home to investigate, neighborhood Islamists beat him with pieces of charred furniture and cut off his right ear. The mob shouted: “We won’t leave any Christians in this country.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Massacre of Copts**

The culmination came on October 9 when the Army and Islamists massacred 27 Copts in the Maspero neighborhood of Cairo, while injuring hundreds more. A few weeks before, a video circulated by Sheikh Ali Gomaa, Egypt’s Grand Mufti, declared all Christians as *kuffar*—“infidels”—and synonymous with

“enemies” and “evil-doers.” On Sept. 30, Christians in Aswan seeking to build a new church were attacked by a Muslim mob. There was a permit to build the church, but Aswan’s governor, Gen. Mustafa Kamel al-Sayyed, implied construction was illegal. Priests tried to avert the attack by taking down a cross and bells on their church, but to no avail. Churches and monasteries are now regularly targeted, if a bell tower or a cross rises too close to a mosque.<sup>46</sup>

Days after the Aswan attack, Muslim villagers in the southern province of Sohag tried to storm Saint Girgis church, shouting “No to church construction.” Then Christians marched from the Shubra slum in the direction of Egypt’s heavily fortified state television broadcasting headquarters along the Nile River near downtown. They demanded compensation and the ouster of Aswan’s governor. “The people want to topple the field marshal [Tantawi]! , the protesters yelled as the clashes broke out. They chanted, “No to the burning of churches” and “Raise your head high. You are a Copt.”<sup>47</sup>

On the basis of false reports that Copt demonstrators had seriously injured police, together with Prime Minister Essam Sharaf’s claim that foreign conspirators were behind the Copt protests as well as his refusal to issue a promised anti-discrimination law, the White House issued a statement blaming Copts and Islamists equally. It read: “The President is deeply concerned about the violence in Egypt that has led to a tragic loss of life among demonstrators and security forces. Now is a time for restraint on all sides so that Egyptians can move forward together to forge a strong and united Egypt.”<sup>48</sup>

On Monday following the Sunday massacre, Coptic Pope Shenouda prayed over candle-lit coffins of the dead mourners in the Abbasiya Cathedral. Many wept and chanted slogans calling for Tantawi to step down.<sup>49</sup>

Despite President Obama’s hopes, the Arab Spring shows signs of becoming a nightmare for Christians in Egypt.<sup>50</sup>

### **The U.S. and Egypt: Alienated Allies**

Once the linchpin of U.S. Mideast influence, post-Mubarak Egypt is now a problematic ally. The accelerating alienation is at work along two dimensions—the first, economic.

Egypt is a near-bankrupt country, with declining financial reserves and bond ratings, collapsing currency, capital flight, and diminishing tourist revenue, that is barely able to import the food consumed by its people. Yet remarkably, the interim military government—under pressure from populist critics, including the Brotherhood, has chosen to decline new financial support from the U.S. and other international benefactors. On top of the longtime traditional U.S. aid package of \$2 billion annually, the Obama administration has offered \$1 billion in debt forgiveness and another \$1 billion in loan guarantees. Yet in July, the Military Council rejected a proposed budget based on U.S. generosity because it was viewed as compromising Egyptian sovereignty. Egypt’s new go-it-alone economic stance extended to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, from which Cairo declined to request \$3 billion in

additional aid. The military government did, however, accept \$500 million no-strings-attached from Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf countries.<sup>51</sup>

“Only saying that we refuse those loans isn’t enough. We need to see effective local economic measures that will support production, and we have to stop depending on set resources such as real estate, the Suez Canal and tourism,” says Hassan Nafaa, an Egyptian pro-democracy activist. “For example, we should start adopting more effective development plans for agriculture and industry.” This politically driven, well-intentioned formula is probably a prescription for economic isolation and disaster for Egypt.<sup>52</sup>

A leading Egyptian presidential candidate and former Secretary General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, has long been a reliable weathervane of anti-American tendencies. The Egyptian aversion to U.S. “meddling” in particular is so strong that even the offer of American observers to certify the fairness of upcoming presidential elections was opposed.<sup>53</sup>

Diplomatically, the new Egypt’s obsession with demonstrating its independence from the U.S. was in evidence across a broad front. Egyptian **Facebook** demonstrators who, a few months ago, focused their anger on the Mubarak regime, are now using their new freedom to openly blame Egypt’s woes, including its declining diplomatic influence, on the U.S. “The U.S. was keen to manipulate the political situation in Egypt, and this was disastrous for Egypt and the United States,” claims Nagui el-Ghatrifi, a former ambassador who’s now a liberal politician in the newly formed Justice Party. Egypt has caused further unease in Washington by appointing its first ambassador to Iran in thirty years.<sup>54</sup>

Whether Egypt hopes ultimately to collaborate with, or instead compete with, Tehran in Middle East politics is unclear. Similarly, the new Egypt’s current courting of the Saudis could reverse if a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government in Cairo decides to pay back in kind the Saudi regime for its hostile treatment of the Brotherhood since the 1980s.<sup>55</sup>

### **Turkey and Declining U.S. Influence**

Finally, there is Turkey. Basking in sky-high popularity ratings in the Arab world where his admirers tout him as the greatest non-Arab hero since Saladin, Prime Minister Erdoğan made a grand tour of North Africa, Egypt. Wraps were taken off of Turkish Islamists’ long-time dream of a neo-Ottoman revival, with twin pillars in Islamist Turkey and soon-to-be Islamist Egypt, contingent on the outcome of upcoming elections. Asserting Turkey’s new claim to “ownership” of the Palestinian cause, Erdoğan at the same time lectured the somewhat uneasy Egyptian Islamists on the political wisdom of sounding “secular” even if they do not really mean it. The strategy worked in Turkey—why not in Egypt?<sup>56</sup>

The January 25 Tahrir Square Revolt—the product of decades of police brutality, political corruption, worker discontent, and declining standard of living—not only blew the lid off Egypt’s status quo, but profoundly reduced U.S. leverage over an increasingly unstable society. The State Department’s vacillating statements about Mubarak didn’t help, and now a fearful Washington sees no alternative but to make peace overtures to the Islamists in Egypt as well as Turkey. What is clear at this point is that Egypt

intends to ignore Congressional threats of an aid cutoff in order to reorder its foreign policy in defiance of the U.S., especially regarding relations with the Palestinians and Israel.<sup>57</sup> **Israel and Egypt: Collision Course?**

Writing just months before Mubarak's fall, Jonathan Spyer in *The Transforming Fire: The Rise of the Israel-Islamist Conflict* (2011) recognized the failings of the Egyptian regime, yet complimented it for crucial recognition of the critical need to act in alliance with Israel against Fundamentalist Iran and its radical Palestinian clients:

Egypt, after a long period of uncertainty, has begun to act in a determined way against Iranian attempt at encroachment. During Israel's Gaza operation in early 2009, Cairo's decision to keep the southern exit from the Strip sealed played a crucial role in the military setback that Hamas suffered during the operation. The calls by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah for the bringing down of the Egyptian regime at that time brought the new regional cold war into its sharpest focus.<sup>58</sup>

Today, that Egyptian firebreak against Islamist Fundamentalism engulfing the Middle East and encroaching on Israel no longer holds. In the pivotal month of May, there were three destabilizing developments affecting the Israel-Egyptian relationship. First, the new Egyptian government completed the courtship with Hamas begun under the Mubarak regime, by brokering a Palestinian "unity" deal that Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal journeyed from Damascus to Cairo to sign. Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil Elaraby also announced he might visit Gaza. Approving the new Egyptian-brokered pact with Hamas, Brotherhood Chairman Mohammed Badie warned—that if Israel took action against Hamas—Egypt might have to respond militarily because "any government in power will have to respect the choice of the [Egyptian] people."<sup>59</sup>

Second, over Israeli objections, Egypt reopened after years of closure to prevent arms smuggling the Rafah border crossing, essentially ceding Hamas sovereign control of the Gaza border. The Egyptian Foreign Minister called the Mubarak regime prior closure of the crossing "shameful," and Egypt's Military Chief Sami Anan warned Israel on his **Facebook** page that it "has no right to interfere in the issue . . . This is an Egyptian-Palestinian matter." In June, Israel intercepted a weapons shipment through the Sinai crossing intended for Hamas.<sup>60</sup>

Third, there was the third of multiple attacks on Egypt's Sinai natural gas pipeline to Israel (and Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon). Despite Israel's willingness to allow the Egyptian Army to enter northern Sinai to protect the pipeline, in technical violation of the 1979 peace treaty, Egypt did nothing, leaving pipeline protection in the hands of unarmed, low-paid civilian guards drawn from among the disaffected Bedouin population who, according to Bedouin Sheikh Abu Elayan, consider peace with Israel "a dagger in Egypt's heart." For thirty years under Mubarak, the Bedouins had threatened to bomb the pipeline, but did nothing. Between 2004 and 2006, Bedouins had also been accused of complicity in the Sinai's Red Sea resort bombing that killed 130 people. Now, Bedouin were identified by Egyptian spy chief Omar

Suleiman as targets by Iranian agents seeking to create a smuggling network to supply Hamas through Gaza.<sup>61</sup>

Fourth, 350 violent protestors outside Israel's embassy in Cairo commemorating the Palestinian "Nakba" marking the 1948 War demanded an end to Egypt's peace treaty with Israel. A participant in another demonstration against the Sinai gas pipeline warned: "If the government won't cut it off, the people will." Rather than repudiate such demonstrations, Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister Yahya el-Gamak put the blame on Israel for fomenting "sectarian strife" in Egypt.<sup>62</sup>

A few months later, there followed the takeover of Israel's Cairo Embassy by Islamist thugs protesting the death of six Egyptian border guards in Israel's response to the deadly attack on Eilat, in which some Egyptians participated. In August, an Egyptian had climbed the Israeli embassy and tore down the Israeli flag; for this the authorities rewarded him with a new apartment. In September, a mob took the next step, trashed the Israeli Embassy, and trapped six Israeli security officers. Field Marshall Tantawi refused to take calls from Benjamin Netanyahu and Shimon Peres, and only a plea from President Obama caused the Egyptians at the last moment to use commandos to free the hostages who were flown out of the country.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, there has been another attack on the Egypt's gas pipeline to Israel, hours before the November 28 elections.<sup>64</sup>

## **An Orphaned Peace**

The Egyptian-Israeli peace has always been "an orphan"—with little support across Egypt's political spectrum. Could Israel and Egypt now find themselves on a glide path toward conflict, especially if the Israelis found it necessary to take military action across the Gaza border into Sinai to prevent shipments of new and improved Iranian missiles to Hamas? Most observers see war unlikely, given Israel's military strength and Egypt's dependence of U.S. military aid to maintain its army. However, Middle East analyst Lee Smith cautioned that though "the rational calculation is that Cairo understands it would lose that war as well as the \$2 billion dollars in US aid, . . . [the] problem is that very little we have seen in Egypt over the last six months is based on rational self-interest." And though the Brotherhood's higher echelons gave mixed signals about whether in power they would abrogate the 1979 peace treaty, they left no doubt about their belief in a U.S.-Israeli conspiracy against Egyptian wellbeing. "There is an Israeli-American project that aims to humiliate the nation, weaken its beliefs, cause a moral corruption, attempt to steal and loot its wealth, and eradicate its cultural privacy," Brotherhood Deputy Chairman Sayed Habib charged. Other Egyptian Islamists were even more forthcoming about their willingness to go to war with Israel. "We fought against the Camp David Accords, we fought against the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and we'll keep fighting," said the Secretary-General of the Islamist-leaning Labor Party, Abdulhameed Barakat. "The United States discriminates against the weak and the poor, while Israel, the invader, can do anything without American criticism." The Egyptian media falsely accused Israel of providing weaponry for the Army's new crackdown on Tahrir Square protestors, and Osam Sultan, Deputy Head of the Egyptian Al-Wasat Party, claimed: Israeli evil is behind." Some in Egypt obviously would like to tip the balance toward a new Mideast war.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

The current Egyptian moment is a positioning phase for the critical elections by both domestic and international actors. Egypt's democratic factions have been desperately trying to move beyond **Facebook** messaging to a credible national campaign. The Muslim Brotherhood, having built a bottom-up mass following, is skillfully playing the theme of peaceful transition for electoral purposes, yet sub rosa is preparing for something quite different, having alerted its cadres last year to the possibility of a move from a quiet "Meccan" period to an imminent new "Medinan" (violent) phase of struggle. The Army is looking for ways to insure its influence beyond the elections by institutionalizing the military's political role in the yet to be drafted Egyptian Constitution, perhaps on the model of the Turkish military prior to the rise of Turkey's Erdoğan regime.<sup>66</sup>

A likely outcome is for a transition for Egypt from the secular authoritarianism of the Mubarak era to the Brotherhood's Islamist populism. Pre-election polls put electoral support for the Brotherhood in the 15 to 30 percent range. Given the Brotherhood's organizational strength, 30 percent may prove to be the floor rather than the ceiling in what turns out to be a decisive Islamist victory.<sup>67</sup>

The Obama Administration seems to have resigned itself to a Brotherhood victory in Egypt by putting the best face possible on negative developments that may include the imposition of Shariah Law, economic collapse, and the flight of capital and the upper class to Europe and the U.S. A leading candidate to be Egypt's next president, Amr Moussa, combines harsh criticisms of the U.S. and Israel with vague assurance that he won't withdraw from the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.<sup>68</sup>

It's difficult to know what strategies would be most effective for friends of democracy who are worried over the prospect of a radical Islamized Egypt and the Arab world. One thing is certain: wishful thinking is no match for the Muslim Brotherhood's well thought-out game plan.

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