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Egypt before & after September 11, 2001: Problems of political transformation in a complicated international setting
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The author thanks the Institute for Developing Economies (Japan External Trade Organization) in Chiba, Japan for the academic facilities to complete the present study.
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Introduction *

It may be easy to cite the political developments in Egypt after September 11, 2001. But it would be difficult to understand the dynamics of what is going on there without prior reference, albeit at a glance, to what had been accumulating at least since the Gulf War 1990/91. In other words, since the end of the global ancien regime with the downfall of the Berlin Wall on November 11, 1989. So, between September 11 and November 9 lies the story of a country that astonishingly has upheld its ancien regime and not replaced it with a nouveau regime. The incumbent regime has managed to absorb such shocks as the global transformation post November 9 (the Wall era), the Gulf War, the Middle East confrontations over Palestine and Iraq, and finally the second global transformation post September 11 (the Twin-Towers era).

Schematically, an understanding of the Egyptian situation requires a three-dimensional outline of the country and its continuing regime: the Economy (at least as it stands now), the Society (with its more deep-rooted social problems and mass grievances that affect the social fabric), and lastly the Polity of a nation and a state system moving, or standing-still, amid the stormy winds of the global and regional developments. Hence, this is a treatment of the country’s politics in the tri-pronged framework of cosmopolitics, geopolitics and domestic politics. In such a perspective there might lie the test to the following hypothesis: while the Egyptian regime has proved durable and able to endure short-term tremors (as those mentioned above) it might not to the same extent prove capable of handling the cumulative effect of such developments. Owing to its structural weaknesses (economic, social and political), the incumbent regime cannot absorb the long-term trauma and would rather be absorbed by it. That is, at some point in the near future a nouveau regime would be imperative in Egypt of the early 21st century.

1. The Economy

* Egypt is the gift of the Nile ... This is an ancient caption that may have suited ancient times. In its present day reality Egypt does not depend on its economy to preserve its image as an important country. It defies that economy to retain that image. Egypt’s economy is its biggest weakness. Of the main regional powers in the Middle East (Turkey, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt itself) Egypt demographically heads the countries with Arab majorities (some 70 million Egyptians¹ out of some 280 million Arabs). Contrarily, its Gross National Product/GNP (at less than US$ 100 billion) is the smallest (with a dwindling growth rate in the last few years that it hardly matches the population growth rate). Hence, its low per capita income (at some US$ 1530 per annum in 2001, according to World Bank statistics) and its low rating in

* The transcription of Arab words and sources follows the current Egyptian version.

¹For a summary of basic demographic indications see: Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil: A Reading of the Primary Results of the Population Census 1996, Al-Ahram, 11.10.1997. For a summary of more recent statistics see the press conference of the chairman of CAPMAS: Al-Ahram, 8.5.2001.
the *Human Development Reports* (ranging between 109 and 119 of all the countries of the world)\(^2\) in the last few years.

For the survival of its population (living in the Nile Valley and the Delta on less than one tenth of its mainly desert land), Egypt does not depend on agriculture and industry. Although, it was historically an agricultural country inhabited by a peasant majority (fellaheen) and providing the world with 70% of its Long Staple Cotton. Furthermore, it has resisted two earlier attempts at industrialisation: the period between the two World Wars and the period after the Nasser-led Revolution of July 1952, especially in the early 1960’s under socialistic slogans.

To feed, educate and recreate its people Egypt depends on three sources of national income:
- Tourism
- Transmittances (from Egyptians working abroad)
- Transportation (on the Suez Canal).

A *fourth source* was for some time its oil exports although Egypt was not one of the large exporters. Recently these have shrunk, awaiting resuscitation with the new discoveries, especially of natural gas. No less ominous than this shrinking sector are three shaky sectors, all of which depend on external factors beyond the control of the national actors. Tourism (with 5.5 million visitors at best as compared with ten times that figure in neighbouring Mediterranean countries like France, Spain and Italy) is affected by terrorism (as happened after the Luxor massacre of November 1997 and as happens recurrently with every bout of regional tension in the Middle East). Transmittances of Egyptians working abroad, especially in the Gulf, are affected by wars and tensions in the host countries which tend to restructure their economies to the disadvantage of expatriate labour. As for the revenues of the Suez Canal, they depend on the demand of international transportation, especially in the oil trade sector.

A *fifth distinctive source* of Egypt’s economic survival is its ability to attract foreign aid and loans.\(^3\) This is in a striking contrast to its limited ability to attract direct foreign investment. The facilities given to Egypt in terms of aid and lending would be envied by other Third World countries. Egypt is given such support because of its important role in security and stability in the Middle East. In other words, Egypt sells its geo-strategic location and supplies, at an economic price, political services to satisfy demands for regional and global stability. Egypt would have been in worse shape, economically, if it were not bailed out by the international politico-financial community (the Paris Club), which wrote off a considerable part of its heavy foreign debt in the aftermath of the Gulf War 1990/91. But yet, it has to look after its domestic or internal debt, which has recently reached a critical stage.\(^4\) Equally critical is Egypt’s chronic trade deficit. Egypt imports at a value of no less than US$ 15 billion but exports at a value of no more than 5 billion to date. Making up the difference, reducing imports, increasing exports\(^5\) etc. remain the agony of the economic discourse in the country.

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\(^2\)Uthman Mohamed Uthman: Economic Reform and Its Socio-Development Returns, Al-Ahram, 27.7.2001. In early 2003 Egypt’s Prime Minister gave the figure of US$ 1400 only as the country’s *per capita*. Al-Ahram, 29.1.2003.


\(^4\)See the heated discussion of the economic policy at a session of the *Shura Council* (Second Consultativ Chamber of Parliament) at: Al-Ahram, 22.12.2002.

At the moment, the economic discourse has shifted to two ominous directions. Firstly, instead of speaking of a surplus of savings in commercial banks at home, let alone abroad, which await channelling into proper investment, the discussion has turned to the shortage of liquidity. The government has lagged in paying what it owes, business magnates have not paid back their bad debts and, as a consequence, the banking system has suffered and been exposed to new regulations and overhauling. Secondly, the government’s biggest financial success, the stabilisation of the exchange rate between the Egyptian pound and the US$ reached an end after over a decade. The pound had to be devalued several times (it has lost about one third of its value in the last two years), US$ reserves in the Central Bank were used to stem further devaluation (again about one third of the reserves was consumed) and the black market for free currencies has resurfaced.

The liquidity crisis, the dollar crisis and the burgeoning real-estate crisis (its market being stagnant forced new legislation to activate it) are no mere economic crises in the technical sense. They auger a downward change in the position of the middle class in particular. This class has represented simultaneously the safety valve and the challenging risk for the survival of regimes like the Egyptian one. So long as the bulk of its members sense the security of a roof over their heads and some money for rainy days in their bank accounts, the middle class does not rebel. But when the value of both (the apartment on the real estate market and the purchasing power of the money deposited in the bank) is threatened by depreciation and devaluation the middle class has a different view. As it senses the agonies of the lower classes, it might begin to move in a more resentful and rebellious direction. But this depends on how the weak economic performance of a country like Egypt is reflected in the life of its society and the dynamics of its politics.

What the tragic events of September 11, 2001 did to the Egyptian economy was to aggravate an already existing crisis. While the country has endured a loss estimated at US$ 2.5 billion (of which 1.6 in tourism), its ruling elite has gained a new excuse for its poor economic management.

When speaking of Egypt’s economy one cannot avoid a dramatic postscript. How come this economy sustains such abysmal performance while it contains some of the most qualified and talented people in the Third World and in some cases of the advanced world? Egyptians of the economic diaspora, so to speak, have proven themselves with distinction. They are good scientists in the New World (America, Canada and Australia), good builders of buildings and whole modern states in the Gulf, good farmers in Iraq, and good professionals in many fields in many countries. Why cannot they be as successful in their own homeland and raise its poor economy?

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6 Astronomical estimates put Egyptians on top of the list of Third World depositors in banks outside their countries.

7 For a defense of the government’s economic policy and its overhauling measures see the Prime Minister’s statement to Editors-in-Chief of newspapers: Al-Ahram, 29.8.2000. Also his interview: Al-Ahram, 11.11.2000.


9 See also the special dossier on the middle class in the periodical of the Centre for Political & Strategic Studies at Al-Ahram: Ahwal Misriyya, No.1, 1998.

The answer to the above question lies at the doorsteps of the politico-managerial elite of the country. The ruling elite of Egypt, which is dominated by state bureaucrats (the *muwazzafeen*), has little wealth of vision but plenty of managerial poverty and excuses for its abysmal performance. But once again, this is a socio-political question.

2. The Society

The poverty of the Egyptian economy is mirrored in three forms of societal poverty. *Firstly*, the managerial poverty of the state administration both in the bureaucracy and in the large state-owned public sector of the economy. *Secondly*, the absolute poverty\(^{11}\) of the majority of the population. *Thirdly*, the ethical poverty in administering social relations between individuals and groups within the society at both national and local levels.

Understandably, the lack of resources in a developing economy is the main creator of economic poverty. But managerial poverty is, in turn, a co-creator and generator of further poverty. Productivity, cost-effectiveness and correction of wrong-doing are no less important than the very distribution of national income. Managerial poverty makes the poor suffer more. Some societies are better than others in managing their livelihood with the same volume of limited resources. Mismanagement of these limited resources accentuates the poverty they have created in the first place.\(^{12}\) While absolute poverty emanates from a non-competitive economy it brings with it, ironically, a highly competitive society in the negative sense. People’s struggle for survival on limited resources forces them to savage competition. If this, again, is mismanaged the end result is the collapse of civic behaviour and the spread of ethical poverty. This vicious circle has been the sad story of Egypt of late.

Half a year after America had its September tragedy Egypt had its own; this time at the hands of the monster of neglect, not terrorism. The state machine which succeeded in its war against terrorism failed abysmally in protecting the lives of its citizens in a dramatic episode: hundreds of passengers were burnt to death as their burning train continued its journey for some kilometres after exiting Cairo; the driver unaware of what was happening in the wagons and the spectators at the roadside unable to stop the train and the tragedy. Official estimates put the number of victims in the hundreds while laymen put it at thousands since the train was packed with thousands and only a handful got out alive. What matters, besides the loss of human life on this scale, is the sensational way the flames of the Upper-Egypt Train began to burn the complacency within Egyptian society, at least within the elite.\(^{13}\) The tragic train incident was not just an accident. It represented the culmination of the symptoms of disintegration of the social order in Egypt towards the end of the 20\(^{th}\) century. Its incidence and the reactions it provoked it have highlighted the question that critics inside and outside Egypt

\(^{11}\) Not only in the quantitative terms relating to bread and butter and the living standards but also in the qualitative terms relating to the levels of education and health services; the two sectors which have drastically deteriorated in Egypt in the last years. On the difficulties and also achievements in the education sector see, for example, the statements of its two Ministers: Al-Ahram, 29.9.2000.


\(^{13}\) Aside from the highly critical writings in the opposition and independent press see the no-less-critical writings in the official press itself. For example, at Al-Ahram daily in 2002: Salah-eddin Hafez: What Is the Value of Man? (27.2.2002); Farouk Guwaidia: The Simple People of the Third Class (1.3.2002); Fahmi Howaidi: Footnotes on the Notebook of the Disaster (5.3.2002); El-Sayed Yassin: A Case Study of Egyptian Behaviour (9.3.2002); Salama Ahmed Salama: An Eloquent Message (20.3.2002); Maghawry Shehata Diyab: Towards a New Approach for Reading the National Project of Renaissance (20.3.2002).
continue to pose: *What is happening to the Egyptians?*  

The investigation of the Upper-Egypt Train incident treated both sides of the coin: neglect by officials of the state-owned Railways Agency and neglect by citizens/passengers in disobeying the regulations for safe travel. The court verdict in this case carried a highly-alarming message to the whole of the state system. It acquitted the junior employees charged for trial and asked for the senior culprits instead. *Stop the cover-up … the court said. That is, end the working of the golden rule of the socio-political system.*

Another culmination took place a few months later, incidentally ahead of September 2001. More fire in Upper-Egypt. An accident (criminological) of tribal vendetta or an incident (sociological) of social violence occurred. It involved the killing of 22 people, including a 12-year old child, in return for the previous killing of one man. This was a novelty. For tribal vendetta was based, for hundreds of years, on a tête-à-tête rule (and no killing of children). It was the job of analysts to attribute the incident to the general social atmosphere in which unruly violence was accommodated.  

But that was a novelty. Over the preceding years a plethora of critical writings warned against the spread of socio-political violence. This included: terrorism or ideological violence, state violence against citizens, especially police brutality and torture, new forms of violent crime, violent juvenile behaviour at schools and the general accommodation of violence as a social code of conduct.

2.1. Violence

Rape amidst the crowd in the city centre of Cairo (Al-Ataba Square) augured in the 1990s as a decade of different sorts of violence. These could be classified into the following categories:

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16 As an example of the early alarms at the beginning of the decade see at Al-Ahram: Fahmy Howaidi: Al-Qar’i (The Doomsday or the Deluge), 31.3.1992 and Nabil Abdel-Fattah: The Clangour of Violence, 7.4.1992. Both articles were written in the immediate aftermath of the notorious rape case in Cairo city centre (Al-Ataba Incident). For writings at the end of the decade see for example at Al-Ahram: Mohamed Nour Farahat: Notes on the Crime Scene in Egypt (28.4.2001); Mohamed Salamawi: The Phenomenon of Violence … Where did it come from? (7.5.2001); Nabil Abdel-Fattah: The Efficacy of Law … From the Power of Legislation to the Power of Disorder (21.5.2001); Fahmy Howaidi: Anxiety for the Present and the Future (29.5.2001); Amre Hashim Rabie: The State and the Values of Respect of the Law (23.7.2001). See also: Hani Ayyad: Crime and Violence in Egyptian Society, Ahwal Misriyya, No. 15, Winter 2002.
- **Terrorism** or ideological religio-political violence, which reached a peak in 1992/93 and ended in a showdown between the state and terrorists. The state, resorted to violating human rights and exceptional measures to win the battle.\(^{17}\) The terrorists continued to act sporadically (especially committing the Luxor massacre of foreign tourists in November 1997). But the highest tide of their operations was brought to an end.

- **State violence**, not only in the context of its confrontation with the terrorists but also as a general mode in dealing with its citizens. Police brutality is a case in point.\(^{18}\) In partial acknowledgement of this, the government took the risk of trying scores of police officers accused of torturing inmates (the court acquitted them for lack of evidence) early in the decade. Later in the decade, trials took place of individual police officers accused of torturing inmates in custody and police stations in Cairo and elsewhere. Some have recently been condemned and sentenced.

- **Baltaiga** (Ruffianism), a hitherto *dwindling* conventional phenomenon, resurfaced and spread. The Baltaiga (Ruffians) or Futuwat (Bullyboys) force their extra-legal order in districts and streets, sometimes in complicity with the police and other state authorities.\(^{19}\)

- *Conventional crime* reached higher levels of savagery and brutality (e.g. mutilation and burning of bodies). Crimes hitherto limited in scope, like children killing their parents and vice versa, became more frequent.\(^{20}\) The number of rarer crimes like killings committed by lawyers and state prosecutors increased.\(^{21}\) These were all additional to the killings that took place inside rich men’s clubs like the Arcadia Mall incident.\(^{22}\)

Besides the atmosphere and practice of violence as outlined in the framework above, there remain two important features of the social disintegration in Egypt: *corruption* and *sectarianism*. While both are closely connected to politics they assume wider social dimensions as they spread to the broader social sphere. In their cancerous sprawl they move across the board from being regime practice to being covered up by the elite to finally being adopted by increasing segments of the populace. They have become a national socio-cultural disease.

### 2.2. Corruption

Like all human societies, Egypt has known corruption since it has known itself. No novelty here. But it becomes something new when it reaches a massive scale that is *unprecedented*

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\(^{18}\) For a list of examples quoting other newspapers see: Magdi Ahmed Hussein: The Series of Police Terror, Al-Shaab, 17.10.1997. Also: Maysa Noh: Crimes of Police Officers, Rose El-Youssef, 2.2.1998. See also reports on torture in Egypt by national and international human rights organizations (e.g. Behind Closed Doors: Torture in Egypt, by Amnesty International, London).


(as described for example in the articles of Saleh-eddin Hafez, Fahmy Howaidi, Salama Ahmed Salama and others at the official newspaper Al-Ahram) or unbridled (as described by the late Tahseen Basheer in an article at the opposition newspaper Al-Waf) or requires a statement from the top (as demanded in the other opposition newspaper Al-Shaab by the late Helmy Murad, who had to go to jail for saying this). In a word, the conventional horizontal corruption that scatters here and there has become more of a vertical corruption that trickles from the top. This kind of corruption can be broken up into the following categories:

- Corruption within the political class, beginning from the head of the fish. It involves commissions in the arms trade, oil trade, foodstuffs and other commercial transactions of the state. It extends to granting state licenses in the different fields from construction to the media besides manipulation of supply and demand in the agricultural sector by rural rulers and their national patrons. One of the largest bounties for a corrupt political elite is state land and the related real estate sector, where price dumping is used to facilitate paternal acquisition and cliental distribution. Notable examples include the Sinai land for former generals of the army, the intelligence and the police, the beach villages on the Northern Coast west of Alexandria for both military and civilian beneficiaries of the political elite, and distinctive other places in the country (like the villas of Ministers at Abu-Sultan in the Suez Canal zone).

Here, press coverage stops short of the top echelon. Only the second row of political leadership can be hinted at or dealt with in the discourse against corruption. The first row can be dealt with only in whispers, jokes and a few fleeting remarks made orally or in writing. Indeed the press has dealt with the corruption of former Ministers and Governors, and incumbent second-men in important civilian institutions of power. Both categories form the substance of the recent official campaign against corruption, with some of these men taken to court and condemned, acquitted or rehabilitated.

- Corruption of the administrative class of the executive authorities in the bureaucracy and different government bodies. This is the oldest and most common form of corruption that it is seen by citizens as the natural order. Many state employees, the mu-

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23 For an example of his articles on the subject: Combating Corruption...The Responsibility of All, Al-Ahram, 4.3.1992. In this article he noted: While the Japanese Parliament was seriously debating corruption our own Parliament was bringing the debate to an abrupt end.

24 For an example of his articles on the subject: When Might is above Right, Al-Waf, 11.5.2001.

25 See his campaign about the misuse of power in the richman summer resort of Marina at the Northern Coast (several columns at Al-Ahram in the summer of 2000).


27 Alaa Al-Aswani: Speaking of the Head of the Fish, Al-Arabi, 29.4.2001. See also his novel The Building of Jacobian, alluring at the corruption of the top of echelons of power.

28 Most jokes are attached to the elder son of the President, Alaa Mubarak.

29 See the exchange, at a Cairo University academic gathering, between the scholar Ahmed Abdalla and Usama al-Baz (Director of the President’s Bureau for Political Affairs) on the issue of jokes on Alaa Mubarak. “Are they smoke without fire?” asked the scholar. A twisting “Yes” was the 10-minute response of the President’s Advisor.

30 For example: Adel Hammouda: The Last Game of Safwat Al-Sharif (Vice-Prime Minister and Secretary-General of the ruling party). Al-Arabi, 30.7.2000.

31 Al-Shaab, organ of the Islamist Labour Party, was engaged twice in lengthy campaigns against incumbent Ministers it accused of corruption. For this, it suffered court sentences against its journalists including its Editor-in-Chief Magdi Hussein who spent two years in prison. See: Adel Hussein: We are not afraid of the Corruption Mafia, Al-Shaab, 25.2.1992.

32 Notably, the case of the former Finance Minister who received a harsh prison sentence at the end of 2002. A second-man of the agriculture sector was sent to trial. Under trial, too, is a second-man in the media establishment; another one from there was ousted then, when acquitted by court, was rehabilitated into other positions in public life. Two former Governors of Al-Giza were condemned by the courts; the first with confiscation of assets and the second with imprisonment. See: Verdicts that pleased public opinion, Al-Ahram, 22.12.2002.
wazzafeen, are corrupt almost by definition and there should be no surprise here.\textsuperscript{33}
But the reason for recent grievances has been the abnormal scale that has become the norm.\textsuperscript{34} On the other hand, it affects the life of citizens to an expansive degree since Egypt has a highly centralised state that interferes in the details of its citizens’ daily life. Now the expansive is becoming expensive, not only in terms of bribes that have to be paid everywhere to government employees\textsuperscript{35} but also in terms of the danger posed to the very lives of citizens. Because of state employees' corruption, the bill paid to victims of the two natural disasters, the Earthquake 1991 and the Floods 1994 (collapse of school buildings, for example), were much higher.

The abnormality of the corruption of the 1990s is further manifested in the tampering done in an arena that has habitually been sacrosanct. For an ageing bureaucracy it was imperative to keep in good order the basic records of the citizens it controlled. Basic birth, death, marriage and divorce documents are now being tampered with for a bribe by their own guardians, the state employees.\textsuperscript{36} "Hameeha … Harameeha (Its Guardian is Its Thief)," says the Egyptian proverb. This affected the work of the judicial system: you cannot sentence or carry out a sentence on a person who has a death certificate! The judicial system itself, conventionally respected and considered the pride of the country, is a victim of the sprawling corruption, as more judges are being caught and prosecuted.

If corruption is added to the inefficiency of an inflated bureaucracy, employing some 5.5 million (plus 1.5 million in the public sector) out of Egypt’s 70 million (10% of Egyptians and about one third of the country’s labour force are muwazzafeen), one could guess the type of state/citizen relationship that exists without talk of political repression or torture. Citizens are tormented when having to deal with the bureaucracy without access to nepotism, favouritism and bribery.\textsuperscript{37}

- Corruption of the \textit{business class} both in the public and private sectors of the economy. Corruption cases of varying sizes have involved the public sector since its expansion in the 1960s through its co-existence with a growing private sector in the 1970s, and have increased more speedily in the last decade of the 20th century. The latter decade was inaugurated by the largest scandal involving manipulation of religion in business. This took effect through speculating with the deposits of citizens lured to the artificially high profits of the Islamist companies named tawzeef al-amwal (investing of funds). A collapse in their returns caused huge losses to depositors and warranted the government to end the whole episode. The decade ended with another scandal of similar magnitude. It involved major businessmen who borrowed largely from state commercial banks but never paid back their bad debts.\textsuperscript{38} Some escaped the country altogether.\textsuperscript{39} In both cases at the beginning and end of the decade, the

\textsuperscript{33} For example: Mohamed Al-Gazzar: Control Engineers (checking & licensing buildings on behalf of the authorities) … A Notorious Profession, Rose El-Youssef, 30.3.2002.

\textsuperscript{34} See for example: Helmy Murad: Is there a way to confront the government corruption that makes people suffer?, Al-Shaab, 2.2.1993; Abdel-Fattah Ali: Corruption reached the Ministry Mr. Minister, El-Dustour, 31.7.1996 (this newspaper was closed down later).

\textsuperscript{35} Hussein Ahmed Amin: Have we become a nation of beggars?, Al-Arabi, 29.7.2001.

\textsuperscript{36} For example: Biggest Operation to issue Forged Death Certificates, Al-Ahram, 28.8.1991; Maysa Nouh: Forging Marriage & Divorce Documents at the Coffeeshops of Al-Hussein, Rose El-Youssef, 5.1.1998.

\textsuperscript{37} For example see in \textit{October magazine} in 1991: Abdel-Azeem Ramadan: Return to the Talent of Torturing Citizens (8.12.1991); The Egyptian Citizen and a Journey in the Hell of Government Apparatus (15.12.1991). For more recent commentaries see for example: Abdel-Kader Shuheiib: Where is the State Esteem?, Al-Musawwar, 4.5.2001; Bribery is \textit{Hataf} (Legal or OK), Al-Musawwar, 18.5.2001.

\textsuperscript{38} See for example: Ahmed Ezzeldin: Change for the Sake of Stability, Al-Osboa, 10.6.2001.

\textsuperscript{39} See for example: Adel Hammouda: Escapees with the Milliards of Egypt, Al-Arabi, 15.10.2000.
private sector was the culprit. But this is not to exonerate the public sector. The lending banks are mainly public sector institutions and their managers are no less culpable. This is partially acknowledged by the government with the changes it introduced both in the management and regulation of the banks. In the case of the Islamic companies, senior state officials were known to have benefited from the activities of these companies, some through the handout mechanism nicknamed kushout al-baraka (lists of blessing). Talk of a cover-up was rife throughout the country. In the latter case of insolvent businessmen, some senior officials, especially in the banking sector, had to be sacrificed and deposed. In both cases, corruption has connotations for the aforementioned political and administrative classes. The business class cannot be corrupt separate of these classes. It is the unholy alliance of state corruption and market corruption. Pro-state writers or thinkers, nevertheless, put more emphasis on one side of the equation than the other. While not neglecting the part the state plays in corruption, the substance of their criticisms is directed at the business class as the vehicle for corruption. Owing to the level of institutionalised corruption, Egypt cannot be transformed into a fully-fledged market economy and the state bureaucracy is failing to lead the development of the country. This is an implicit argument fuelled explicitly by the corrupt elements of the business class, who are being aided by the no-less-corrupt elements of the bureaucracy, the public sector and the political establishment. The political establishment gains on both sides: blaming their own corruption on the market … and continuing to claim, ironically, leadership of development and, of course, political power.

- Corruption of the intellectual class. In particular, some journalists of the printed press have been accused by their own colleagues of being bribed off by businessmen and bureaucrats. Some are accused of pan-Arab bribery. Others in the visual media are already on trial for taking bribes to let certain faces appear on TV. University professors are accused of corruption. A flagrant case involved two Vice-Deans of the Cairo Faculty of Medicine accused of tampering with the computerised exam results to let their sons have the highest grades and be appointed on the Faculty staff. In this sector lies the most serious danger of alienating the young generation of the country. The young of Egypt are already bearing the brunt of unemployment (at about 20%) and before the deteriorating standards of their education. They are finding it difficult to get married and lead a decent or even normal life. Can they afford to suffer a deterioration in their morale caused by the retreating morality of their inspirers? Will they retreat into apathy, violence and loss of any sense of belonging?

40 A case in point is that of a senior banker who also served as Chairman of the Economic Committee of Parliament.
41 For example: Ahmed Ezzeldin and Adel Hammouda, loc.cit. and other writings in the weeklies Al-Osboa, Al-Arabi and Sawt Al-Umma.
42 In a case where the court acquitted senior public sector personnel it also criticized the economic policy that is not conducive to investment (Al-Hayat, 12.6.2002).
43 The subject was opened by Fahmy Howaidi and caused a row. See his article: Al-Arabi, 15.4.2001.
44 The receipt of bribes from Saddam Hussein of Iraq is the subject opened by Mamhough Al-Shikh.
45 The case of the state TV News Sector Chief who was sent to trial.
46 For example: Labeeb Al-Siba': Our Universities are in Danger, Al-Ahram, 30.4.2001.
47 The Public Prosecutor referred the two men to court (Al-Ahram, 29.6.2001) which later condemned one and acquitted the other.
48 See our works on the subject: The Question of Youth (1994) and Egyptian Youth Between Belonging and Participation (2000); Al-Jeel Centre for Youth & Social Studies, Cairo. See also: Yahia Al-Gamal: Egypt – A French Fascination … Why Cannot It Be an Egyptian Fascination?, Al-Ahram, 4.1.2003. See also the response to this article by Fouad Riyadh, Al-Ahram, 13.1.2003.
In speaking of corruption in Egypt the picture depicted above seems to be gloomy. State officials would consider such depiction as exaggerative if not malicious. They would say that Egypt is not the most corrupt country in the world ... and there are many good and praiseworthy things in Egypt. Yes...they are right. But the brighter side of Egypt exists despite the policies and practices that invite further corruption. In governmental Egypt, there are many clean-handed officials and state employees who refuse bribes despite their low salaries and difficult living conditions. And, in non-governmental Egypt there are many professionals and NGO activists who devote themselves to serving their needy communities. The inhabitants of these communities form the majority of the population who work with dedication and dignity. There are many honorable people in Egypt. But, given the system that administers their collective life, they are unable to enforce an honorable order.

2.3. Sectarianism
Mahatma Ghandi was right in the late 1940s in praising Egypt for the harmony it forged between its Islamic majority (some 90 %) and its Christian (Coptic) minority (some 10%). Even the two terms majority and minority were not commonly used in the country. More than half a-century later, with sectarianism clearly resurfacing, the famous journalist Mohamed Hassanain Heikal was able to write in April 1994 an article entitled The Copts of Egypt Are Not a Minority – but Part of the Tissue of the Egyptian People. This was in response to an academic seminar treating the issue of minorities including the Copts in the Middle East. The seminar provoked a reaction by Egypt’s politico-intellectual elite that it was removed from Cairo to Cyprus. Notwithstanding the terminology and the event, the substantive issue of sectarianism in Egypt remained an item on the agenda of national concerns.

The Copts’ sense of elevation reached its peak with their participation in the anti-British nationalist Revolution of 1919 and the subsequent decades of building a modern state in Egypt. But the curve began a gradual downward trend with the gradual advent of the Moslem Brotherhood, who claimed for Egypt an Islamic state not a secularist nation-state. However, the slide was checked until the early 1950s by the continuing, though dwindling, popular appeal of the secularist majority party, Al-Wafd and by the longevity of the generation who led the nationalist revolution, including prominent Copts like Makram Ubaid Pasha. The Nasser-led Revolution of July 1952 was influenced at the beginning by the Moslem Brotherhood, but came to an early showdown with them. The Moslem Brotherhood was persecuted for some 20 years and a secularist-socialist regime was established. But some features of the nouveau regime affected the Copts negatively. Originally, there was not one Copt amongst the leadership of the Free Officers and their Revolutionary Command Council. Secondly, the socialist-driven measures of land reform and nationalisation of private companies affected some propertied Coptic families. Thirdly, to compensate for its repression of the Moslem Brotherhood and to let its socialism pass in an Islamic society the regime had to keep certain Islamic countenance (for example, investing more in Islamic teaching at Al-Azhar, Egypt’s gateway to playing a role in the Islamic world, and inaugurating projects like the Quran Radio Station). Increasing numbers of Copts changed their domicile and migrated to the New World. Those who stayed at home began to change their feelings slightly in anticipation of what might happen next in Egypt. The activist Coptic elite in public life began to shrink (marginal membership of Parliament for example), with the Coptic Orthodox Church assuming the position of spokesman for a de facto minority.

The change of feelings became a change of facts when Sadat came to power at the beginning of the 1970s. He unleashed the Islamists against his leftist opponents; a tactic which cost him his life a decade later. This decade was the peak of a saga for sectarian relations in Egyptian society. It began with the Al-Khanka sectarian incident in 1972 (for which a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry was formed and reported recommendations still await-
ing implementation in Egypt to date). The following decade began with the killing of President Sadat in the aftermath of another sectarian incident at the Cairo district of Zawya Al-Hamra which he had used as an pretext for imprisoning his leading opponents, no matter which political variation (the September Massacre). The pro-Islamic development ended the President’s life and the regime faced a crisis; a political one with sectarian aftertaste.

Mubarak, in power since 1981, dealt with the crisis by reconciling with the opposition. But towards the middle of his first decade in power both the political and sectarian tensions re-surfaced again with the resurgence of Islamic militancy. There were incidents of aggression against the Copts, especially in Upper Egypt.49 The clamp-down on the Islamists towards the mid-1990s may have secured control of political power. It did little, though, to change sectarian sentiments and perspectives that had accumulated over these decades.50 If something was new about the sectarian incidents, beyond the normal tensions in daily life, it would be that they became fewer in number but worse and more sensational in nature. They involved the repeated burning of churches,51 this time extending to revered ones like the convent of Deir Al-Meharrak in Assiut in 1994. Worse still, they involved the incident of Abu-Korkas Church in 1997; for the first time people were killed while worshipping. The nadir was reached with the three consecutive incidents in the same village of Al-Kosheh in 1998, 1999 and 2000.52

Finally “the straw broke the camel’s back”. Thousands of hitherto reclusive Copts demonstrated ferociously at the courtyard of the Patriarchal headquarters. They were nominally protesting against a newspaper’s vulgar reporting, with porno-pictures, of the case of a deviant priest.53 But they were essentially letting the toll of their grievances be known to all. In choosing the courtyard of their religious leadership to air their resentment (rather than the Parliament or the Press Union or even the street) they were inadvertently providing the proof that they themselves had become reactive sectarians.

The era that has witnessed such incidents, that has seen the worst record of Parliamentary representation of the Copts,54 has had to witness the occurrence of a new dimension affecting the whole issue of sectarianism in Egypt. That is the external dimension. Egypt had to face a three-pronged off-shore involvement in its Coptic Question. Firstly, the multitude of international human rights’ organisations dealing with minority issues in particular and human rights in general. Secondly, the growing number of Copt organisations in the diaspora (Al-Mahjar).55 Thirdly, the US administration, especially after it passed a new Congressional law and formed a committee to observe the issue of religious freedom world-wide. Indeed, sup-

49 The sensational incident of Sanabu (Assiut province in Upper-Egypt) where 13 Christians were killed in May 1992 was a landmark for the sectarian killing of the 1990s.
50 On the Coptic problem in general see the works of Milad Hanna, William Suleiman, Jacob Antonius, Edward Al-Zahabi and others. See also an article by Magdi Khalil: All the World Acknowledged the Problems of the Copts Except the Egyptian Government, Watani, 12.8.2001.
51 The most recent case is the church in Maghagha (Minya province) in Feb. 2002. See for example the large coverage of this incident in Al-Ahali, 13.2.2002.
52 More than 20 Copts were killed in the last episode of the sectarian series in this village. The court failed to convict specific killers amidst the mob. See the Statement of the 100 public figures on this incident and the whole of the sectarian problem in Egypt, in: Watani, 20.2.2000.
54 On this see reports/books of the Centre for Political and Strategic Studies at Al-Ahram on the elections between 1984 and 2000.
55 For a comprehensive work see: Magdi Khalil: The Copts of the Mahjar, Dar Al-Khayal, Cairo, 1999.
port of religious freedom became a part of American aid to other countries. All three sources represent a development that is to be taken into serious consideration by the main internal actors: the government, the Coptic Church and the Coptic elite and masses. For all their nationalistic jargon and rhetoric they cannot ignore external influences on an issue they for their part failed to resolve.

The Egyptian government’s officials usually indulge in the habit of repeating the old discourse: We do not yield to external pressure. In fact, they do. Almost all sectarian changes introduced, cosmetically or tangibly, were a response to external pressures. These included highly publicised reports of human rights’ organisations, fact-finding visits by UN Commissioners, American Congressmen and British MPs, demonstrations and lobbying by Copts of the Mahjar etc. Much of the response itself in recent years has been purely cosmetic in form, for example, state officials attended en masse the prayers at Christmas, broadcast them at length on TV. Coptic figures were invited onto TV programs etc. More tangible measures were the appointment of more Copts into the leadership bodies of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and the selection of more Coptic candidates for its elections’ slates. Coptic figures were increasingly in demand in this arena. This was in contrast to the Coptic-free NDP lists for the elections of 1995. The Party’s Assistant-Secretary General at the time justified it by saying: We list candidates who win votes.

Thus, the vote-losers of the near past now seem to be Egypt’s gateway to winning the respect of the international community. A symbolic, but significant, gesture taken by President Mubarak was to declare Christmas Day, 7th January for the Orthodox Copts, an official holiday for the whole country. On January 7, 2003, and that for the first time in their life, Moslems of Egypt reciprocated observance of a holy day with their fellow Christian citizens. Would the symbolic gesture auger a new era of sectarian harmony? Or is the accumulation of religious fanaticism of the preceding decades more entrenched and does it require the re-education of the nation through more comprehensive measures and programs?

Finally a word about the impact of September 11, 2001 on Egyptian society. While debacles and human earthquakes can have an immediate impact on economic and political situations, they do not affect societies to the same extent. Social change is a process that is by nature gradual and cumulative. It involves systems of values, modes of behaviour and collective interactions. These take time to change. In the case of Egypt, this rule applies as it does anywhere else. But a related issue that can be grasped more easily is to gauge the reaction of the political elite as it deals with swift developments. Not only in its response to the imperatives of international co-operation against supra-national terrorism but also in the way it puts its house into order. This applies to its economic management as well as to its dealing with social problems and the dictates of keeping a solid social fabric amidst the storms.

The ruling elite of Egypt, characteristically rigid and slow to change, seems to be sensing its endangered position after September 11. Paradoxically, it takes comfort from the fact that its services are still required for the campaign against international terrorism. The urge for speedy change is thus offset, although the initial sense of pressure for change is there. There are only very embryonic indications that this feeling is being translated into action.

All three negative social phenomena (violence, corruption and sectarianism) seem to change slowly, enhanced and slightly accelerated by the events of September 11. While still

57 Usually boycotted by politicians and intellectuals; except Human Rights’ activists like Hisham Kassem and from the government side the loyalists who are given clearance to do so.
58 Especially David Alton who prepared a report on the Coptic issue.
failing to address different forms of social violence, the regime in Egypt is using the terrorist threat for its own sake and for the sake of international co-operation. As regards corruption, the campaign combating it is being somewhat broadened, although many taboos remain untouched. The Public Prosecutor seems to have a more open way of sending cases of corruption to the courts. As for sectarianism and the influence of international factors on government action it suffices now to refer to the aforementioned novelty of a Christian holy day becoming a holiday for the Moslems of Egypt. All of these measures have latent September 11 connotations in them. Admittedly, they are political in essence. But they would leave longer-term imprints on Egyptian society.

3. The Polity

When we look at the polity of Egypt as a nation-state administrated by a certain state system ruled by a particular elite we are confronted by a most striking paradox: a solidly rigid regime which has seen very little change over two decades walking a tightrope in a turbulent region (being itself part of the turbulence), while still maintaining minimal peace and having an active foreign policy, that secures friends all over the globe. Many observers would see here an irony between the poor performance on the home-front and the comparatively successful one on the external fronts. Regime proponents would argue otherwise: the stability at home has secured successes abroad. Not withstanding this controversy, there is a gap which is revealed when Egyptian politics are studied intellectually.

On the eve of the 1990s, a group of Egyptian intellectuals gathered at the Centre for Political Studies at Cairo University (founded and directed by Prof. Aley-eddin Hillal, who later became Dean of the Economics & Politics Faculty, then Minister of Youth) to discuss The Political System of Egypt – Continuity and Change. They had heated discussions and disagreements. In the following year, they gathered to discuss Egypt’s Foreign Policy. They had dumb discussions and little disagreement. On presenting a commentary on a paper entitled The Egyptian Diplomatic Apparatus – Veteran or Archaic?, Ambassador Amre Moussa (later Foreign Minister then Secretary-General of the Arab League) said to the author: although you have been more critical in your oral presentation still there is little to disagree about. This epitomised the near-consensus on the country’s foreign policy amongst the intellectual elite. As for home affairs, the scope for conflict is ample. In the middle lies the sphere of near-home regional policy, where less agreement is noticeable, especially as regards the Egyptian-Israeli peace and its substance. The disagreement was intensified as Egyptian intellectuals and politicians were split over the issue of the Gulf War 1990/91. All in all, from consensus to disagreement to conflict extends the continuum of Egyptian politics in its international, regional and domestic manifestations.

3.1. Cosmopolitics

Outside the Middle East Egypt has virtually no enemies in the world at large. Even inside its turbulent region, where Israel represents the historic and strategic enemy, it has a peace treaty with Israel. Between the two countries a cold, but durable peace has been maintained for a quarter of a century. The unaccomplished part of the peace mission regards the Palestinians not the Egyptians proper, for all the sympathy the Egyptians have towards the Palestinians.

For all its national and regional failures, the Mubarak regime deserves credit for its suc-
cesses in the broader global reach of Egypt’s foreign policy. While Sadat fixed Egypt in the American camp after the October War in 1973, causing tensions with the Soviet camp, Mubarak has defused those tensions while continuing to solidify relations with the US. The critics in the earlier period wanted a less Americanised and more non-aligned Egypt. But, by the middle of Mubarak’s reign there was no bi-polarity to fix Egyptian neutrality; the Soviet Union fell dead. To pursue the critique of Egypt’s being an American satellite proved to be a difficult exercise. Mubarak’s Egypt had recurrent disagreements with the US and proved itself not to be a banana republic. Moreover, the highest tide of popular anti-Americanism in Egypt has taken place under Mubarak.  

Mubarak’s regime is keen on strengthening ties with Europe. The closest ties have been forged with France under President Mitterrand and President Chirac. Cultural dimensions strengthened the political will; Egypt being considered a fascination francaise. Egyptian policy may have seen itself in the mirror of French relative autonomy vis-à-vis the US. Both countries seek to be non-subservient partners of the US. Other pro-European Egyptian policy included partnership at the Barcelona process whose Declaration from November 1995 encompassed countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region. After heated debate inside concerned circles within Egypt and heated negotiations with the European Union, Egypt finally ratified its Partnership Agreement with the EU. The latter remains Egypt’s prime trade partner. Though European aid to Egypt is less than America’s, European markets receive more Egyptian exports than the American market does. Even at the intellectual level there is more signs of a Euro-Arab dialogue than of an American-Arab one.

That is not to ignore tensions with Europe involving Egypt and other Arab and Islamic countries. A case in point is the growing Neo-Nazi movements and the xenophobic attitudes of the extreme right in Europe. Sporadic tensions between Egypt and Europe developed over issues of human rights. Notably, the imprisoning of the famous social scientist Saad-edden Ibrahim in June 2002 for allegedly having received funds from the EU without permission from the Egyptian authorities. Also, the imprisoning of a group of homosexuals in Egypt. But all in all, as regards its present European policy Egypt has surpassed its bad experiences with Europe in the past: British Occupation for 72 years (1882-1954) and French Napoleonic invasion (1798-1801), besides the confrontation over the Algerian War (1954-1962). For both Britain and France jointly, Egypt’s image has broadly changed since their trilateral inversion (with Israel) leading to the Suez War (1956). If Egypt retains reservations on European policies towards the Middle East conflict (at some point there was a rupture of diplomatic relations with individual European countries like the Netherlands), it still finds the EU policy towards the core of the conflict (Palestine/Israel) more balanced than that of the US.

Egypt’s outreach to other Third World countries has been a traditional policy since Nasser’s support for national liberation struggles in Afro-Asian countries. After the independence of the bulk of these countries Egypt continued its close ties with them in the framework

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63 For a rare voice calling for dialogue with the Jewish lobby in the US see: Usama Al-Ghazouli: A Plea for Dialogue with the Monster, Al-Ahram, 23.11.2001.
64 There is a huge file on this case in different languages as it was widely covered in the press in Europe and America. It even caused tensions in Egyptian-American official relations because Ibrahim retains both nationalities.
65 See for example: Europe Offers Asylum to Egyptian Homosexuals, Al-Ahhar, 7.9.2001; Six Thousand French Signatures Protesting the Condemnation of Egyptian Homosexuals, Al-Hayat, 9.2.2002. It is worth mentioning that President Mubarak did not ratify the verdict and the harsh prison sentences and returned it to court for a retrial.
66 Still functioning in Cairo, though with less glamour, is an organization established in the 1950s named the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization. It receives support from the Egyptian Foreign Ministry mainly.
of the Non-Aligned Movement, which also included Latin American countries. It continued to play an active role in more recent forums of these countries, like the Group 77, the Group 15 etc. As Minister for Foreign Affairs under Sadat and Mubarak, Boutros Boutros Ghali (later the UN Secretary-General) tried to resuscitate Egypt’s active diplomacy in Africa and extend it further into Latin-America, especially Mexico. Egypt retains embassies in most countries of the world, its Foreign Ministry’s Institute of Diplomatic Studies trains Egyptian, Arab and African diplomats, and its diplomats make a highly professional community.

Traditionally, and understandably, Egyptian diplomacy was keen on forging good ties with the two Third World powers: China and India. Indeed, some diplomats who served there assumed important positions in the diplomatic and political establishment. From Nasser to Sadat to Mubarak this tradition has been upheld. Despite some lost ground in India, relations have remained cordial. With China relations have remained strong. President Mubarak has made a point of this since his time as Vice-President under Sadat. He has visited China more than once and strengthened economic and political ties. In addition, other wings of the wider political establishment, like the Al-Ahram publishing house, have sustained active involvement with China. Al-Ahram’s Editor-in-Chief visited China with a team of his staff. The visit and contacts made there were widely reported in their daily newspaper. Many intellectuals, too, welcome and press Egypt’s close ties with China and India.

Prior to September 11 both governmental and non-governmental Egypt were deeply immersed in the turbulence of the Middle East, namely the bloody confrontation in Israel and Palestine (Isratine to quote the Libyan leader Ghaddafi). Meetings at political parties and professional unions’ headquarters, the formation of committees of solidarity and street demonstrations formed the non-governmental reactions to the events in Palestine and Israel. After a long time of political dormancy, activists of past generations (especially the leftists of the 1970s and the Islamists of the 1980s) joined hands with a hitherto apathetic younger generation of pupils and students. Added to their genuine feelings of sympathy towards the agonies of the Palestinian people, they found a political role to play at last beyond the regime’s previous suffocation of political participation. The regime itself let the outpouring of public feeling express itself to a controllable extent. This also served the regime by letting it appear to be patriotic and democratic. It even attempted to highjack some non-governmental efforts (like sending relief assistance to the Palestinians) and attributing them to the benevolence of the informal figure-heads of the state (e.g. the First Lady). Another service was also rendered to the ideologues of Islamism and Arab nationalism, who never thought there was room for Arab-Israeli peace; the conflict being in their eyes one of wujoud not hudoud (existence not borders).

The heavy dictate of the regional conflict on Egypt’s cosmo-politics, as far as its non-governmental activism is concerned, was reflected in massive anti-Americanism. America and Israel are viewed as being one. The burning of the two flags, the Star of David and the Stars & Stripes and calls and campaigns for boycott of the two countries’ products became

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68 Like Amre Moussa himself (former Ambassador to India in the 1980s) and Mustafa Al-Fiki (Secretary of the President of the Republic for Information and later Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of Parliament) who served in both countries. Also Norman Galal who served in China: See his article: Dialogue with my friend the Chinese businessman, Al-Ahram, 6.1.2002.
70 Prime amongst them is Anouar Abdel-Malek who has been for decades pressing an Ostpolitik for Egypt towards China and India extending it to Japan; the Eastern Circle or the Silk Road, as he calls it. Also the journalist Mohamed Oda who pushes towards India. See also: Milad Hanna: Egypt, India and China together…From the Depth of History to Information Technology, Al-Ahram, 13.2.2001.
the order of the day. Anti-Americanism was also expressed in the context of the anti-globalisation movement\textsuperscript{71} and the Egyptian NGOs' participation in the Anti-Racism Conference in Durban 2001\textsuperscript{72}, where America and Israel ultimately stood isolated just a few days before September 11.

Just a few hours after the tragedy in New York, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania some one thousand Egyptian activists were gathering at a stone's throw from the American Embassy in Cairo. They wanted to be right at its doorstep but the police kept them at bay while allowing a delegation of them to reach the outdoor of the Embassy and present a statement. They did not bring condolences but condemnation, of American support of Israel.\textsuperscript{73} Beyond this momentary irony, non-governmental activists in Egypt have continued burning the Stars & Stripes as if nothing bad had happened to America but a lot of bad was being done by America in Palestine. The American reaction to September 11 encouraged Afghanistan and Iraq to become brothers united in being harmed by America. Thus a sequel was added to the series and anti-Americanism intensified.\textsuperscript{74} Anti-Israeli activism continued and carried some anti-Jewish connotations that encouraged the Jewish lobby in France to bring Al-Ahram's Editor-in-Chief to trial in absentia in a Paris court. The American Embassy in Cairo, too, later protested on the same count in an Egyptian TV drama.

Condolences to America were given by governmental Egypt. But governments are not created only to observe rituals. They are there to pursue policies. A variety of September 11-related issues were posed for the Egyptian government to tackle. Firstly, they have to exonerate the very name of Egypt, since the first leaders of this international terrorism are Egyptians: Ayman Al-Zawahri,\textsuperscript{75} the second man to Bin Laden (the first man intellectually), and Mohamed Atta, the chief of the destruction team of September 11. Egyptian organisations, namely Al-Jihad and Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyya, topped the list of American-censored organisations because of their wanted terrorists. Accusations of regime complicity in creating terrorists were levelled at Egypt and Saudi Arabia by the American media; notably the uncomplimentary Thomas Friedman. Secondly, the government had to deal with details like the fate of some 580 Egyptians believed to be with Bin Laden in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{77} All this is in addition to the paramount difficulty of proving its firm anti-terrorist stance while the highest tones of pro-Bin Ladenism and anti-Americanism were being played on its soil.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{71} A burgeoning anti-globalisation movement is gradually growing in Egypt. For example the forming in the middle of 2002 of the Anti-Globalisation Egyptian Group (AGEG).


\textsuperscript{73} Al-Ahram, 11.9.2001.

\textsuperscript{74} On the demonstrations of one month only, Oct. 2001, see for example:
- Demonstrations of Alexandria and Munufiya Universities (Al-Wafd, 1.10.2001).
- Demonstrations of Cairo University (Al-Wafd, 4.10.2001)
- Demonstrations of different universities (Al-Wafd, 10.10.2001; also Al-Hayat).
- Demonstrations of Al-Azhar Mosque (Al-Wafd, 13.10.2001; also Al-Hayat).
- For a comprehensive coverage see: No to the Massacre ... Save Afghanistan, Al-Osboa, 15.10.2001.

\textsuperscript{75} Some suggested stripping him of Egyptian nationality (Al-Ahali, 24.10.2001).

\textsuperscript{76} Asharq Al-Awsat, 3.11.2001. Also: In the American List: Most Terrorists From Egypt, Afaq Arabiya, 18.10.2001.

\textsuperscript{77} Alaa Anter: The Fate of 580 Egyptian Members of Al-Qa'ida, Sawt Al-Umma, 5.12.2001. See also the various columns of Salama Ahmed Salama pressing the Egyptian government to care for its citizens in American custody (e.g. Al-Ahram, 19.12.2001).

\textsuperscript{78} This dilemma of the Egyptian government is succinctly summarised in the article of Abdel-Monem Said (Director of the Centre for Political & Strategic Studies at Al-Ahram): Egypt and the Crisis of 11\textsuperscript{th} September 2001, Al-Ahram, 19.11.2001. Notably, the American Ambassador in Cairo was engaged in a hot summer debate in 2002 with Egyptian intellectuals who continued to exonerate Bin Laden.
Indeed, “official Egypt” spoke highly and acted swiftly in favour of the American and international anti-terrorist campaign. But it would have preferred a clear definition of terrorism by the entire international community rather than the single-handed American definition. America’s definition includes those considered by Egypt to be freedom fighters not terrorists. Egypt would have also preferred an avoidance of war in Afghanistan while bringing the culprits of September 11 to justice. More emphatically, it does not want a war in Iraq while pressing the Iraqi regime to be respectful of UN resolutions.

In the war against terror Egypt has been co-operative and valuable on the intelligence front. It has provided names and information on 150 alleged terrorists to the US and other countries. For a summary of the security measures and political perspectives of official Egypt post-September 11 one could quote verbatim the pronouncements of Egypt’s Interior Minister to the semi-official weekly magazine Al-Musawwar (interview with Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 28.12.001):

- Egypt did not export terrorism, it warned other states against hosting Egyptian terrorists.
- Egypt provided America with ample information that aided its war against terrorism.
- Most terrorist leaders at home now acknowledge their wrong thinking and we engage in dialogue with the imprisoned extremist minority (only four of the thousands released reverted back to their jama’at).
- I stopped physical torture in prison because it helps create new, more extremist generations.
- I stopped arresting families of fugitive terrorists to avoid creating new terrorists.
- Egyptian Emergency Law is more merciful than the new powers given to American security institutions.
- Human Rights groups have now fallen silent after Washington itself decided to resort to Military Courts.
- I cannot guarantee that the Sudan is without terrorists but I trust the orientation of President Bashir now.
- Yemen often made excuses that Egyptian terrorists were hiding amongst the tribes, but they are active now in combating these groups.
- Four Egyptians of the Al-Qa’ida leadership have been killed to date.
- Bin Laden’s last tape is sufficient to condemn him and I consider it a complete confession.
- America has broken the Al-Qa’ida organisation and Bin Laden will die sooner or later. But the fugitive remnants of his organisation will be more savage in their retaliatory reactions.

No further comment is needed to spot Egypt’s official position as expressed by the pronouncements of its Interior Minister (a police General). Exterior Ministers tend to master diplomatic discourse and can pay lip-service sometimes. Not only does it inform us about the official attitude towards national and international terrorists but it also gives us a glimpse of another post-September 11 trend: regimes like that of Egypt now know that their services are needed for the war against terrorism. They also know that the American system itself is becoming an engine geared towards security, über alles, like themselves, and finally they real-

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ise that the American democratic slogans threatening them are only *slogans* at least for the
time being. This perspective of cosmo-politics may shape a lot of the home affairs policies of
Egypt and other countries.

### 3.2. Geopolitics

In its cosmo-politics Egypt has made friends all over the globe. This is evidenced culturally
on the stages of the Cairo Opera (built with Japanese funding as an Educational and Cultural
Centre) and other theatres. Guests extending from the Japanese Kabuki to the Argentinean
Tango (not to forget the great violinist Yehudi Menuhin). In the geo-politics of this turbulent
region Egypt itself has been an integral part of the turbulence. It is the largest Arab country
(and one of the largest three in the Middle East – the other two being Turkey and Iran), and
has played three distinctive roles over more than half-a-century: *war-maker, peace-maker*
and *trouble-maker*.

As a *war-maker*, its armed battalions were the largest participants in all Arab-Israeli wars
(1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973). It was also indirectly present in the First Gulf War (the Iraq-Iran
war, which consumed all the first half of the 1980s) through arms sales to Iraq. In the Second
Gulf War 1990/91 it stood with the International Alliance directly against Iraq for the liberation
of Kuwait. In the preceding few years it had failed to appease the suicidal regional ambitions
of the Iraqi regime through its incorporation in a regional pact named the Arab Co-operation
Council (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Yemen). As a war-maker or participant Egypt had military
successes, failures and stalemates (performing best in the October War 1973). Like all other
Arab countries it was a mere spectator of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and its capital Beirut
in 1982, of what should be considered the fifth Arab-Israeli War.

In its role as a *peace-maker* its successes and failures were more resounding. It is a matter
of some dispute whether merely preventing deterioration of a situation is a success or a
failure. Here too lies Egypt’s categorisation as a *trouble-maker* since it has been accused of
deliberately keeping the stalemate of non-war/non-peace with a wait-and-see tactic. In the
worst cases it is accused of being more energetic in discouraging certain peace accords over
Palestine and the Sudan.⁸¹

The tragic events of September 11 and the super-crisis they provoked caught Egypt al-
ready immersed in the crises of its region: Palestine, Iraq and, additionally of special impor-
tance to Egypt, the Sudan. Those are properly named the three hot spots in the arch of crisis
by Amin Howaidi⁸² (a former Defence Minister and Chief of Intelligence under Nasser). What
September 11 did was to draw Egypt more deeply into the mire of this difficult region. Egypt
has to endure the difficulties while playing a valuable regional role for which it is paid interna-
tionally. Both the role and its price are now subjected to the requirements of the US-led inter-
national campaign against terrorism after September 11. The irony here is that Egypt and the
US broadly agree and tightly co-operate as regards terrorism while they largely disagree as
regards Palestine, Iraq and the Sudan. As Amin Howaidi put it: *The US sees the world better
without the head of Saddam in Iraq, the head of Arafat in Palestine and with the two heads of
Bashir and Garang in the Sudan. Egypt sees otherwise.*

In the present sixth Arab-Israeli War, and in the second Palestinian Intifada, Egypt is
deply involved at both governmental and non-governmental levels. In its support of the Pal-
estinians, official Egypt stops short of engaging in active war with Israel and upholds its
peace accords with it. Some non-governmental and semi-governmental activists and writers
would prefer an upgrading of the confrontation with Israel: they would expel the Israeli Amb-
assador (the Egyptian one has already been summoned from Tel Aviv), abrogate the Peace

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⁸¹ A belated attempt to convince Palestinian factions to stop military action against Israel occurred with Cairo
hosting a Palestinian 10-faction meeting (The Japan Times, 23.1.2003).

Treaty and ultimately go into active war. Less vociferous writers on peace (activists for peace, seen as traitors, have no room now\textsuperscript{83}) warn against an escalation that might lead to a repeat of history and charge future Arab generations with the liberation of even more lost ground. Both governmental and non-governmental elements support Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and devastation.\textsuperscript{84} On the controversial suicide attacks against Israeli civilians some whole-heartedly support them as legitimate resistance, some provide the intellectual religio-political justification for them,\textsuperscript{85} some take them as religious martyrdom of Islamic heroes. But a few see them as an act of desperation to be understood but counter-productive. Many fewer reject them on principle as Palestinian crimes in response to Israeli crimes. But this latter perspective is only found in whispers and private talk. The atmosphere in Egypt regarding the agonies of the Palestinians does not leave much room for the exploration of the validity of the policies of the Palestinian leaders and fighters. Any critical views are automatically accused of heresy and treachery.

Despite the difficulties the Palestinian issue causes to the Egyptian regime it still helps to distract people’s attention from domestic affairs – a god-sent grace to any regime facing internal difficulties. The tragedy of Palestine has its benevolent side to Arab regimes. It helps them rule their subjects autocratically and repressively under the excuse of the national struggle. As Nasser once put it: No voice should be louder than the voice of the national battle.\textsuperscript{86} For this type of justification they need an enemy or a danger that is da’im (durable) but not dahim (devastating enough to topple them). Israel serves this purpose perfectly given its aggressive behaviour. The end result is that all Arab peoples have to succumb to living without democracy while the Palestinian people lose on both counts: neither having a democracy nor a homeland.

The present turbulence in the Middle East over Palestine is but one episode in this vicious circle. It is reflected in Egypt in proportion to its weight in the region. Its rulers remain in receipt of both dangers and benefits. Its intellectual elite hovers between providing a perspective of peace and one of war,\textsuperscript{87} ending up as a class proposing the older prescription of non-peace/non-war. As for the masses at the bottom they get more frustrated at the durability of excuses, not only for non-provision of democracy but of bread and butter. The elite allows them instead the satisfaction of expressing their sentiments towards Palestine, Iraq etc. – international issues but not any other issue.

The autumn that followed the failure of Camp David II and in which the second Palestinian Intifada broke out, forced the parties back to point zero.\textsuperscript{88} The conditions had worsened,

\textsuperscript{83} See for example the resignation of the journalist Reda Hillal from the Copenhagen group (Cairo Association for Peace).
\textsuperscript{84} To refer to any sources here would be to quote the bulk of the Egyptian and Arab press! For a count of figures of Palestinian losses of life and property see: Mohamed Amin Al-Masri: Count of Equal Heads, Al-Ahram, 8.12. 2001.
\textsuperscript{85} For a significant example see: Fahmy Howaidi: They Are Not Civilians, Al-Ahram, 11.12.2001; The Martyrdom Operations, Al-Ahram, 16.4.2002.
\textsuperscript{86} See the older cynical lyrics of the poet Ahmed Fouad Negm:

Halloo...Halloo...Mr. Hambaka (pretentious bully boy)

No voice should be louder ... than the voice of Maarak (battle)

Long live ... Lady Maarak!

\textsuperscript{87} An exemplary case is that of the prominent intellectual El-Sayed Yassin who writes soberly on global issues and those of the Middle East conflict (at the cost of being criticised by others like Magdi Hammad, the ardent Arab nationalist) but reverts sometimes, at the behest of the tragic events, to an uncharacteristic fiery language. Compare for example his two articles at Al-Ahram: A realistic Vision to the New Man (24.8.2000) and Beyond Neo-Nazism (16.4.2002). A similar fluctuation is noticeable in the case of Mohamed El-Sayd Said.
\textsuperscript{88} Note for example how events reversed the forecast of the prominent scientist Rushdi Said that proponents of peace on both sides would prevail in the end. See his article: Necessity of Preparing for the Challenges After the Settlement, Al-Ahram, 12.4.2000.
however (Israeli brutality against the Palestinians and reactive Palestinian suicidal attacks). The mobilisation of official and unofficial Egypt went parallel with the events of the Mosque (Al-Aksa) Intifada. With the events of the Twin Towers' destruction and its repercussions, official Egypt sensed the gravity of the slide and put a brake on its mobilisation. Even before September 11 there was a significant replacement of its Foreign Minister, Amre Moussa, the orator, who won massive popularity for showing a firm face vis-à-vis Israel, by another one, Ahmed Maher, the quieter diplomat.89

Nevertheless, it is easier to say you are going to put a brake on mobilisation than to do it. Israeli intransigence continued to pour fuel on the fire; a hitherto dormant generation of activists woke up, the satellite Arab media, especially Al-Jazeera, did a lot to make the mobilisation irreversible, and the Islamic faction of activists made it a holy war as opposed to one of human rights and national liberation. Even the more secularist Arab nationalists, leftists, rightists etc. spoke in the language of the Islamists. Human rights activists, too, could not surrender their nationalist credentials to their universal tenets in such an atmosphere.90

Furthermore, the atmosphere was further charged by America's reaction to September 11: They started the war in Afghanistan and set out to sort out the Islamic world in general. The American attitude to the Iraq issue has caused even more friction. A few days before September 11, an article in Al-Ahram91 called for an Arab initiative to surpass Iraqi efforts of eleven years earlier and to pre-empt a prospective American dictate. A few months later, the Iraqi issue became no less prominent than the Palestinian one. The Egyptian government, which disagreed with the US over the heavy bombardment of Iraq in the second campaign of 1998 (Desert Fox), this time completely opposed the US plans for renewed war in Iraq.

For non-governmental Egypt, the developments are even more striking. With the exception of a few fanatic Arab nationalists, a minority even amongst the larger constituency of Arab nationalists, and a few others bribed off by cash and kind, no one else in Egypt liked Saddam, the professed hero of Arab unity. To most Egyptians, he is an obnoxious dictator to his people and aggressor to his neighbours. Subconsciously too, he is viewed by the Egyptian elite as a disclaimer of Egypt's leadership in the Arab world. In defending Iraq against the UN economic sanctions and the US military operations Egyptian activists frequently reiterate that this is for the Iraqi people not the Iraqi regime. Most seem well-intentioned in saying so. But this does not solve their dilemma of being de facto defenders of Saddam whose regime they have to liaise and co-operate with in some of their campaigns of solidarity.92 Finally, the Saddam part is played down and Iraq and Palestine, to some Egyptian and Arab activists, have become one cause.93

If the Iraq issue is further prolonged, militarily or non-militarily, with Saddam or without Saddam, Iraq will become another Palestine-like issue long after the original problem of Palestine itself is resolved. Thus, there can never be peace between the West, led by the US, and the Islamic world which is not led by anyone since its largest country, Indonesia, is in shambles and its other major players, Egypt included, since each has its own concerns to

89 Usama Al-Ghazali Harb: Egyptian Diplomacy. From the Enthusiasm of Amre Musa to the Calm of Ahmed Maher, Al-Ahram, 9.7.2001.
90 For example: Bahy-eddin Hasan: Towards Activating International Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Al-Ahram, 2.12.2001.
91 Ehsan Bakr: Iraq...and the Anticipated Step (2.9.2001).
92 See the Cairo Conference, held in December 2002, which is seen as expressive of this link. Although it was supposed to be non-governmental it was attended by some senior Iraqi officials. Some critics considered it the work of Iraqi intelligence (e.g. the letter of the reader Adnhan Abdalla Al-Nuwab: In Cairo & London... Identical Plea for Leila, Al-Hayat, 3.1.2003).
93 Statement in January 15, 2003 by the National Committee for Combating American – Zionist Aggression. The statement also specifies America and Israel Are One Enemy. Other gatherings include the Egyptian Popular Campaign Against Aggression in Iraq.
care for. A chaotic world order fraught with Islamic terrorists and American military power is very apparent in the Palestine and Iraq issues. Egypt is doomed to remain hostage to such a nightmare situation.

Moreover, Egypt has another serious geo-political problem to face in the Sudan. The post September 11 American attempts at settling the civil war there was seen by many in the Arab and Islamic world as an epitome of the American intent on sorting out this part of the world with Pax Americana. But it is of more concrete than visionary nature to the Egyptians. Hence their worries about the American-sponsored Machakos Agreement (July 2002) between the Sudanese government and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army. A self-determination referendum after an interim period for the Southern citizens is seen in Egypt as a potential danger in its backyard. Egypt dislikes referendums although Egyptian presidents are approved by the Egyptian electorate only through referendums. The reason is that the prospective Sudanese referendum may result in the Sudan being split into two independent states. This is seen by many Egyptians as endangering the very lifeline of Egypt: the River Nile. A plethora of press accounts on the Sudan, the Nile and the Red Sea reflected this concern post-September 11 and post-Machakos.

What the future holds for Egypt in the Sudan would be a sequel to its past there. Since the time of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in the 19th century, the suppression of the Mahdi Revolution of 1881, the independence in 1956, the different military coups which Egypt supported, Egyptian administrations have made grave mistakes in the Sudan. But the Egyptian elite rarely has had the courage to admit them and has tended to deny or justify instead. Many in the Sudan look at Egypt as a regional sub-imperialist power, which helped to suppress their national liberation struggle for a long time and when it succumbed to their independence continued suppressing their democracy in favour of military dictators. There has also been a border dispute over the small triangle of Halayeb in the 1990s. This is a deep-seated sentiment that has not been changed by the cosmetic discourse of brotherly common destiny or even by the more positive role Egypt played in the Sudan to the benefit of its people; promoting education and mediating to end civil wars. Also, it is not mitigated by the fact that the Sudan itself was a source of serious trouble for Egypt, especially under regimes hosting terrorists. At any rate, the stakes are high for Egypt in the Sudan, whatever the outcome of the settlement will be, now that America has ventured into the Sudan directly and has by-passed Egypt. The potential remains for further regional tension, if not a Nile War and further Committees of Solidarity with the Sudanese People.

The failure in the Sudan is but one example of Egypt’s failures in the region. Another notable instance was the collapse of the Egyptian-Syrian Union (1958-1961) and the defeat of 1967. It had also major and minor successes, however. Notably, the mobilisation of the Arab Nation after the Suez War 1956 to end European rule in what is left of the Arab countries of North Africa (especially Algeria) to South Yemen. Even its two major failures are seen by some as not lacking a successful side. The very first attempt at unification of two Arab coun-

94 For a succinct critique of western and US perspectives regarding the Arab and Islamic worlds see: Salah Salem: The Arabs vis-à-vis Strategic Experimentation, Al-Ahram, 23.10.2002. See also: Mohamed Hassanain Heikal: An Appointment with Arab Concerns in the British Capital, Al-Arabi, 15.7.2001.
97 An exemplary case is that of the prominent historian Abdel-Azeem Ramadan in his accounts on the subject. See for example his book: The Lie of Egyptian Imperialism in the Sudan, Series of History of the Egyptians, Public Agency for Books, Cairo, 1994. See also his rebuke of our differing view (our article: Egypt and the Sudan. Payment in Arrears, Al-Khaleej, 21.3.1992) which he published in a column series at Al-Wafd newspaper.
tries was seen as success of courage and the performance during the war in 1973 was better than the ill-fated one in 1967 and referred to as a **success of redress**. Other successes included the resumption of relations with Arab countries under Mubarak that were ruptured under Sadat, post-Egyptian/Israeli peace (this included the return of the Arab League’s headquarters to Cairo). In addition, Egypt defused the tension between Syria and Turkey, who were on the verge of war at the end of the 1990s. Despite Egypt’s concerns about Turkish-Israeli military co-operation, it has managed to improve relations with Turkey in general. The same improvement is evident in the relations with Iran.  

In its cosmo-politics, Egypt, as represented both by its rulers, its intellectuals and laymen, has a problem of image. In its regional geo-politics it has a problem of role. Both problems are tantamount to complexes.

One Egyptian writer of the middle generation (a former student activist and a distinctive case of an Islamist turned liberal) had the conviction, and the courage, to write about the dwindling regional role of Egypt prior to September 11. Anouar Al-Hawwari’s article provoked his peer group mates as well as the old guard to react. The romantic patriotism of Egyptian intellectuals rarely allows them to distinguish between the **potential** and the **actual** in their country’s role in the region. They are so sensitive to any critique of Egypt, especially if it is made by ethnically non-Egyptians. In fact, they do not lack the support of Egypto-maniac Arab intellectuals who care for big brother. Those Egyptian intellectuals undeniably have every right to respond to and even rebuke the vulgar accounts of those sick with Egyptophobia; Arabs and non-Arabs alike. But a problem of intellectual integrity befalls them as they sometimes negate or turn around what they know is true, as they confess in their private talk. Would it not be better, if they cannot politically afford to admit the truth, to remain silent? Or should they invite another accusation, namely, that they are mere muwazzafeen (state employees) who just take orders to tailor their writings to official requirements (as they respond to Thomas Friedman, to Al-Jazeera and to anybody else)?

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98 Note the steady efforts of the Centre for Political and Strategic Studies at Al-Ahram in paving the way for a full resumption of relations between the two countries. It publishes a special periodical entitled *Iranian Studies* (Editor-in-Chief Mohamed El-Said Edris) and its Director and other researchers attended an Egyptian – Iranian Dialogue twice in Tehran. It is reminiscent of the American-Chinese Ping-Pong diplomacy, termed this time Pen-Pen diplomacy. See: Abdel-Monem Said: Reports from Tehran and Cairo, Al-Ahram, 23.12.2002 and 30.12.2002.

99 For example the reactive fury in Egypt after every documentary broadcast in Europe and America on an issue of poverty and other aspects of social life in Egypt. For example a CNN documentary on female circumcision in Egypt. Also, A German documentary showing the dirt and crowd in Cairo. The journalist Ibrahim Higazi rebuked the Germans and protested to their Embassy in Cairo. See his articles at Al-Ahram, 18.5.2001 and 1.6.2001.


102 For a critique of the dominant version of Egyptian nationalism see our book: Egyptian Nationalism. Merit, Cairo, 2000. See also: Gamal Abdel-Gawwad: Egyptian Nationalism in the Age of Globalisation, Al-Ahram, 2.7.2001; Samer Al-Karanshawi: Egyptian Nationalism between Right and Wrong and Weaping, Al-Hayat, 11.6.2002. For a linkage with the basic issue of identity see the series of articles by Anouar Abdel-Malek entitled the *Search for Egypt*: Al-Ahram, 16.5.2000, then bi-weekly.

103 See for example the defense of Egypt by the prominent Lebanese journalist Jihad Al-Khazen at Al-Hayat, 22.6.2001 and other dates. See also the favourable article by the Tunisian intellectual Salah-eddin Al-Jourshi, Despite Everything ... The Egyptian Role is an Arab Necessity, Al-Hayat, 26.9.2002. The Kuwaiti journalist Ahmed Al-Jarallah (Editor-in-Chief of the Arabic Al-Siyasa and the English Arab Times) is known for his steady support of Egypt.
These are questions to be answered by the intellectuals of Egypt. The resuscitated role of their country in the global war against terrorism does not camouflage the issues. They need to read and listen with ears that are attentive to the front-page article of the Lebanese Hazim Saghia in Al-Hayat.\textsuperscript{104} In this article the author, an Egypto-manic mistaken for an Egyptian-phobe, warned the Egyptians against the conspiracy theory on which they base their \textit{Weltanschauung}: The world is not conspiring against Egypt, on the contrary it is offering her preferential treatment. The same applies to its Arab brothers, who want to see it playing a more effective regional role. If Egypt is lagging behind with its weak economy, it should also ask itself questions about its regime rigidity, archaic institutions, lack of efficiency and transparency, mediocre leadership and above all about the dominant thinking that maintains the standstill.

Grand questions require grand answers. In turn, grand answers require a grand constituency to find and provide them. Intellectuals are only one part, for all their prestige. Two other components must advance their say. Firstly, the ruling elite which should realise by now that it can no longer continue to employ the same old military-based bureaucratic state system run by the \textit{façade}, and \textit{fasad} (corruption) of a single ruling party. Secondly, the Egyptian people who realise\textsuperscript{105} but take time to act on the maxim that the Egyptian regime is not exempted from the universal wisdom: \textit{if it cannot be mended... it must be ended!}

3.3. Domestic Politics
Categorically, Egypt is \textit{not} a democracy. Approximately, it is a \textit{multi-party autocracy}. Comparatively, its authoritarian regime is less repressive than those of some other Arab states (Iraq, Syria, Libya, Tunisia etc.).\textsuperscript{106} But, it is despotic enough for the Egyptians, who are deprived of the right to choose freely another President or another Party to rule. \textit{Choosing or changing the ultimate power is out of the question}. Below this level, there are some manifestations of pluralistic politics and tolerance of partial opposition.

Pluralism in Egypt, which began in 1976 with President Sadat, is a detail in a broader framework of authoritarianism, which began in 1952 with President Nasser. The “father”, who is half-a-century old, is parenting and controlling a devious but also obedient “son” who is quarter-a-century old. At a celebration of the “son’s Birthday”, organised by the Centre for Political & Strategic Studies at Al-Ahram, academic and political participants were clearly subdued and sad for the ill-health of the son. On the occasion of the 50\textsuperscript{th} birthday of the “father”, the Revolution of the 23\textsuperscript{rd} July 1952, high profile celebrations were officially observed all over the country, especially in the media. The incumbent regime reiterated its fatherly base of legitimacy, power and leadership. There was little mention of the father’s fatal illness of 1967 (the defeat in the Six-Day War) but a lot of talk of the successful surgery of 1973 (the October War). The latter is presented as a renewed base for all legitimacy, power and leadership. Mubarak is the ideal expression of this since he was a non-participant in 1952 but a leading participant in 1973\textsuperscript{107} (named in the media the \textit{Hero of the First Strike} – meaning that of the Air Force, which he led then). The façade of the festivities could not hide the fact that the father is not considered parent of the whole nation by the Islamists, the liberals and others in Egypt who suffered his repression.\textsuperscript{108} In their view he belonged only to the etatists (state cronies), the leftists (especially Nasserists) and Arab nationalists in whose name they

\textsuperscript{104} Egypt: An Attempt at Unravelling the Enigma, 29.7.2001.

\textsuperscript{105} For an example of dissenting views see: Sabri Said: The Political Discourse of Post - 23rd July State, Al-Wafd, 30.7.2000; Samer Al-Karanshawi: Coup not Revolution ... The Loser is Democracy, Al-Hayat, 23.7.2002.


\textsuperscript{107} In the paintings of the Panorama of October War in Cairo he is made almost the leading one.

\textsuperscript{108} On democracy as a hopeless case in Arab countries see for example: David Gardner: Democracy is just a Mirage, The Financial Times (Weekend), 11./12.5.2002. See also: Gamal Abdel-Gawwad: The Lagging Democratic Transformation in Egypt and Tunisia, Cairo Centre for Human Rights Studies, 1998.
are still ruling the country. The father’s prescription for this rule is still upheld: the same despotism, but with additional blemishes of limited liberalism; to suit the time.

Between 1952 and 1967 the military establishment (with the intelligence apparatus at its heart) ruled Egypt in the strict sense. Since then and up till now it has been ruling, but in the broad sense. Putting aside the privileges given to army men when in service and the posts the senior ones occupy in civilian life (especially Governors of Provinces) when they retire, one mechanism remains their utmost privilege: they retain a military man as President of the Republic. For this to take effect, there must be one candidate for the electorate to choose from. To secure this uni-candidacy the 2/3 constitutional majority of the Members of Parliament nominating him must be secured. To do this, a single ruling party must have this majority. The results of Parliamentary elections must guarantee the attainment of this majority, even if they have to be rigged. This is the unspoken basic rule of the game of Egypt’s political system. The rest are details of varying importance revolving around this military/presidential question.

The rigidity of the political system emanates from this pivotal point in its construct. It does not allow the flourishing of a civilian elite claiming to rule the country, nor does it allow genuine elections to be the basis for choosing rulers of the country; consequently it does not allow mass participation in the dynamics of the system since citizens are only required to confirm what is decided on their behalf. It is not surprising that a monopolistic power structure as such would introduce very little institutional change over half-a-century. This monopoly includes the ruling party (the National Democratic Party, established 1978), which is the party of the President, of the state and of permanent rule. It is the extension of the single ruling parties (subordinate to the military) of Nasser and early Sadat (the Liberation Rally 1954, the National Union 1958, the Arab Socialist Union 1961 and Egypt’s Arab Socialist Party 1976). But at a more subjective level it is still surprising that the circulation of person/post within the ruling elite is also very limited and slow. Three of the big four (2 with military background) of Egypt’s ruling family, beneath the President and his close family, are ageing politicians who have retained their positions for some quarter of a century. One of them, Safwat Al-Sharif (the Vice-Premier and Information Minister who controls the media), is the second in line in the NDP after President Mubarak himself. As NDP secretary-general, Al-Sharif, who served as military intelligence officer in earlier days, epitomises and symbolises the whole story of the incumbent regime in Egypt. If a fifth younger man can be added to the big four, he is none other than Gamal Mubarak, the younger son of the President. It is not only the objective monopoly of power that befalls Egypt but it is also the subjective rigidity of this monopoly.

The political performance in Egypt in the last few years signifies a regime that has managed to muddle through despite a weak economy and deteriorating civic order (violence, corruption and sectarianism as noted above). The principal socio-economic instruments in its survival were mainly the attraction of minimal economic resources (the four external resources mentioned above) and the installation of a temporary sense of security in the middle class. But the political instruments to doing that are of larger significance. They involve the price a country had to pay for a regime to prevail.

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109 See the major source of Anouar Abdel-Malek: Egypt: Military Society (different editions in English, French etc. – recent Arabic edition by Al-Mahrous, Cairo, 1998).
3.3.1. Repression and Regression

When President Nasser died in Sept. 1970, Sadat, as Vice-President, acceded to the presidency with relative ease. But he had to fight his way later with the Nasserites who wanted to continue ruling behind his back. He deposed them in May 1971 and spoke of ending the State of Intelligence (or the police-state) and democratising the system. With the newly-found fledgling democracy, scores of victims of torture in prisons under Nasser wrote to the press, published books and litigated before courts for rehabilitation and compensation. When President Sadat himself died he received massive posthumous rebukes by his opponents, especially those he imprisoned en masse in his blunder of September 1981, a few days before his assassination. But although this was referred to as the September Massacre, rebukes of Sadat were mainly political. No significant cases of systematic torture were registered under Sadat in his eleven-year term. Sadat may have been a bastard to many of his opponents, but he was not a butcher. Torture was used immediately after his death to uncover the assassins. Since then, torture has become a landmark of Mubarak’s regime.

When President Mubarak dies there will be so many claims for rehabilitation (especially by Islamists) that those of the Nasser era will look like a trickle. That is, if the post-Mubarak era is not arranged in a way that keeps the files closed.

Both Nasser and Sadat ruled Egypt with emergency law for many years. But they managed to lift the emergency for a few years and rule without its exceptional law. Mubarak, for 22 years to date, has not been able to manage a single day without emergency law. His reign will go into Egyptian history books as one of exceptional and emergency rule. His apologists claim that he, nevertheless, has kept a measure of stability (termed above as monopoly and rigidity), a measure of democracy (termed above as multi-party autocracy) and, more importantly, he has saved Egypt from terrorism and an Islamic seizure of power. They may be right. But they need to calculate the price of saving a regime at the expense of a country.

In its campaign against terrorists, in particular, and the Islamic threat, in general, the Mubarak regime has applied massive repression (armed campaigns to arrest the activists, torturing them in prison, setting military courts to try them). The outcome is a state apparatus that is rough with its lay citizens not only its outcast rebels. Police brutality has become a routine practice outmatching that of a foreign army of occupation. To rid the professional unions of the Islamists, who dominated their boards, the formula was to throw the baby out with the bathroom water. The professional unions, a moderating tribune for middle class activism, ended up dead and some had to be managed by ad hoc judges not by their elected boards. To rid the broader political spectrum of more Islamists the regime effectively closed down the Labour Party and its organ Al-Shaab, another moderating framework for absorbing

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111 Especially memoirs of Moslem Brothers and Communists. For example the epic of torture at Abu-Zaabal prison near Cairo as told in a book by Ihami Self-annaasr carrying the prison’s name.

112 Many won their claims. Court verdicts, besides financial compensation, included humane literary abhorring of torture. For example in the case of Shuhdi Attiya Al-Shafie, the communist leader tortured to death in the 1960s (trial documents compiled in a book by Rifat Al-Said entitled The Crime). See also a poetry book by Mahmoud Al-Mistikawi entitled Rehlat al-Higilat (Journey of Chains).

113 Of the massive literature on torture in Egypt see some recent examples: Mahmoud Al-Askalani & Khalaf Ali, Torture ... Like Water & Air, Al-Arabi, 24.3.2002; Hussein Abdel-Razek: Torture. A Continuing Crime, Al-Wafd, 16.8.2002. See also the aforementioned reports of national and international human rights organisations.

114 Hussein Abdel-Razek: 20 Years of Emergency, Al-Ahali, 10.10.2001. Needless to say, there is also massive literature on emergency in the Egyptian opposition press and in the reports of national human rights centres, especially the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR).

115 Mohamed Salah: Cairo: Military Courts are for Safeguarding the Fabric of the State, Al-Hayat, 4.1.2002.

Islamic activism. It did so through capitalising on the Party's agitation against a novel accused of being heretic in mid-2000.\footnote{Of the huge file on the novel, Al-Azhar students' demonstrations and Al-Shaab's agitation see only one example: Ibrahim Essa: Permission Please ... I disagree with you, Akhbar Al-Adab, 14.5.2000 and Al-Shaab, 16.5.2000.} Lastly, the regime changed its tactics vis-à-vis the Moslem Brotherhood and clamped down on them, imprisoning some of their leaders\footnote{Notably Dr. Essam Al-Erian the prominent figure in the middle generation (former student activist and leading figure in the Doctors Union) who spent several years in prison in the second half of the 1990s.} and harassing their rank and file throughout the country.\footnote{On arresting the student activists of the Brotherhood see: Al-Hayat, 27.1.2002. On arresting their University Professors see: Karim Sobhi: Most involved with the Brothers are professors, Rose El-Youssef, 12.1.2002; The case of University Professors, Afaq Arabiya, 31.1.2002.} The Moslem Brothers formed the core of the opposition in the Parliament of 1987, by far the best of the five Parliaments under Mubarak, though it was one of the three ruled unconstitutional by the Court.

A regime which has ruled with three unconstitutional Parliaments has left no political or professional opposition institution intact.\footnote{Of the huge file on the retreat of political parties (Downcount for Freezing of Parties, Al-Ahrar, 5.11.2001), on the restrictions on all political and professional organisations (Ahmed Abdel-Hadi: Summary of Amnesty International Report, 3.6.2002) and on Egypt's ranking in UN reports on political liberties.} Its repression has been all in the name of combating terrorism and intercepting the Islamists. The media has not been spared either. In 1995/96, new legislation was hastily promulgated to restrict press freedom and make it easier to put journalists in jail. It had to be withdrawn in the face of fierce resistance by journalists, including the pro-government ones. The last bastion of the apolitical framework for social activism, the NGOs and the civil society in general, were exposed to administrative restrictions in new legislation in 1999 (ruled unconstitutional) and 2002. The restrictions were a reaction to Islamic activism in this sphere. Additionally, they combated the activism of the more secularist human rights organisations which exposed the regime's violations internationally. The arrest and trial of Saad-eddin Ibrahim, no matter what the declared or real reasons are, involved the sending of a message of intimidation to leading civil society activists, who wield less reputation and international protection.

But, has the Mubarak regime really saved the country from the Islamists? From the terrorists... Yes largely, although clandestine cells are recurrently uncovered.\footnote{Ahmed Musa: 83 Terrorists of Al-Wa'ad Organisation, Al-Ahrar, 14.10.2001; Mohamed Salah: Egypt: Multinational Organisation before Military Courts, Al-Hayat, 15.10.2001; Ahmed Musa: 170 Terrorists of the Minya Organisation, Al-Ahrar, 16.10.2001; Mohamed Salah: Egypt: Military Court for 257 fundamentalists, Al-Hayat, 10.11.2001; Abdu Zeina: Reviving Tala'i Al-Fateh (26 accused) and the military wing of Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyya (60-70 accused), Ashraq Al-Awsat, 16.5.002.} From the Islamists in general... No.\footnote{See for example: Dibaa Rashwan: A Look at the Future: The Islamic Phenomenon as a Model, Al-Ahrar, 1.2.2002; Muntasser Al-Zayat: The Future of the Moslem Brothers, Al-Hayat, 18.12.2002. Even the regime itself is accused of unleashing Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyya (by releasing its imprisoned members) against the Moslem Brothers. On ending their use of violence see the pronouncements of some leaders of Al-Jama'a: Al-Ahrar, 2.3.2002. For their auto-critique see their Series of Correcting Concepts (4 books).} They have a genuine constituency in the society and no one can end them (better try to mend them, i.e. rationalising them through absorption into a larger democracy).\footnote{See our argument for including the Islamists in a broader democracy in: Al-Jami' wa Al-Jami'a (The Mosque and the University) ... Critique of Islamists and Intellectuals in Egypt, Second Edition, Dar Al-Kalema, Cairo, 2002.} The regime subdued the early joy in the country at the judicially-supervised parliamentary elections of 2000 at the first stage, although they appeared cleaner than other elections. At the second and third stages it reverted to the older habit and interfered and manipulated. That was done precisely to stop the candidates of the Moslem Brotherhood from reaching Parliament. However, they did, and they do form the largest opposition group, larger than all other weakened opposition parties of Left and Right combined,\footnote{Excluding the Independents who form the largest group after the ruling party.} in the incumbent
Parliament. In two more recent run-off elections, again against Moslem Brothers’ candidates (a woman in Alexandria in 2002 and their former Parliamentary Spokesman in the Delta in early 2003) the regime applied the electoral tactics of bullying and intimidation to stop the Moslem Brothers. This firmly justifies the proposition that what we have seen in Mubarak’s Egypt is: More than a response to Islamism. It is the political de-liberalisation of Egypt in the 1990s.

In de-liberalising the political system under the banner of combating Islamic extremism/terrorism, the Mubarak regime has managed to secure the acquiescence of the secularist elite at large, which is frightened at the prospect of an Islamic state denying them personal liberty and modern ways of life. What is more striking is the attitude of the secularist elite in the opposition, which shares the fear of its constituents. It pursues a particular sense of competition with the Islamists. Few secularist voices stood firm against that repression apart from the liberal Said Al-Naggar and the leftist Nabil Al-Hilali or Human Rights’ organizations. Opposition political parties let the government do the job of sorting out the Islamists. In the process, they relegated their status in the political system and lost their credibility before their assumed constituencies. Many citizens in Egypt do not think, and do not notice any other opposition than that of the Islamists. This state of mind has further weakened opposition parties and left the space open for further ruling-party monopoly. The regime has sensed no pressure to reform and democratisation. A co-opted opposition elite provided the consensus that objectively kept the ruling elite doing business the same old way. Despite their repeated calls for reform those opposition elements remain a voice but do not represent a pressure to be reckoned with. The regime even managed to co-opt in the end some of the most critical voices.

The Islamic factor was crucial for all the above to happen. It sustained the status quo, disrupted reform and justified repression of the Islamists and others besides causing further regression in the hitherto small democracy. In the present situation this factor would be of more global reach. Both inside and outside Egypt’s national boundaries there is huge anti-Americanism along Islamic lines. Even anti-American secularists in the Islamic world follow a semi-Islamic line when it comes to issues like Palestine and Iraq. This Islamic factor is not going to disappear. It might be galvanised even if the US succeeds in settling such issues.

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129 A case in point is that of Refat Al-Said (Secretary-General of the leftist Tagammu Party) who is appointed by the President to the Shura Council. He remains critical but with a diluted tone. A more significant case is that of the prominent leftist journalist Salah Essa who was a vocal critic of the regime and presented elaborate accounts for constitutional and political reforms. He accepted appointment as Editor-in-Chief of Al-Qahira (Cairo) weekly, the organ of the Culture Ministry (whose present Minister has been in office for 15 years to date). While he remains critical he now concentrates his writings on cultural issues. See for example his critical articles at Al-Wafd in 1999: Where do Egyptians become citizens not subject? (1. 7.); Parliamentary Republic is the Solution (8. 7.); The Horse of Democracy & the Chariot of Opposition (15. 7.); Revision of the System of Mubaya’a (Fealty of Pledge of Loyalty) (22. 7.).
130 Diaa Rashwan & Muntasser Al-Zayat, loc. cit. This is despite the harsh critique the Islamists receive in their different variations from moderates to terrorists. See for example: Nabil Zaki: A Call for Tearing the Fabric of the
The question that remains unanswered here is, what America is going to do to these Islamists, other than hunting Bin Laden and his network. If found, there are other Islamists abroad. For America to confront or co-opt these it has to do it by proxy, i.e. through regimes in the Islamic world. Is America going to help democratisation of these regimes at the risk of an Islamic (anti-American) participation in power (the Musharraf model in Pakistan)? Or is it going to push them towards further repression and regression for the requirements of the war against terror? In either case, when we speak of the substance and form of regimes like the one in Egypt and their prospects for democratisation, we should primarily be speaking of an American factor, too.

In the short period after the disaster of September 11, the American urge resembles a monocural search for terrorists so as to stem further repeats of the tragedy. Hence, the juxtaposition of both factors: the American and the Islamic – a sensational example of Hegelian dialectics!

The American monocural view needs to be upgraded to become binocular, so that the US can see something else of importance: The anti-globalisation movement which is not Islamic. In fact, the Islamists have hardly participated in it, if at all. Nevertheless, at some point they might do. That would coincide with the resurgence of social movements addressing problems of poverty, labour rights, social justice etc. The Islamists would try to take the lead in these movements. Thus, the objective ground would have been laid for a broader anti-American/anti-globalisation coalition at both national and international levels. National regimes in Islamic countries and beyond would love to see a re-channelling of energies of resentment into this newly-found Grand Canyon. To cover their failure to manage home affairs and economics they would blame it all on globalisation. They would also now be so democratic as to allow voices of anti-globalisation to express themselves freely while silencing other voices on other issues.

Thus, repressive regimes would survive, thrive and trample over democracy. One wonders how the Americans could break such a mechanism with whatever devices they have for imposing their will and way on the rest of the globe. The Egyptian regime, as a participant in the war against terror, is slightly endangered in this context while greatly benefiting from it. Its future reform would be as slight … and its standstill, if not further regression, would be as great.

3.3.2. Rectification and Reformation

Egypt enjoyed a pregnancy with the preliminaries to democracy for literally nine months: April 1976 – January 1977. That is, between the formal reintroduction of a multi-party system and the bread riots of 18/19 January 1977. Since then the curve has gone downwards. It took a sharp slide over the whole decade of the 1990s. Along this course, Egyptians received three fatal psychological strokes that made democracy in Egypt an additional entry into their long vocabulary of Egyptian jokes:

- When the Sadat regime told them that a multi-party system does not mean circulation of government between different parties, since there would be, as before, one permanent ruling party.
- When Mubarak conveyed to them the message that the early reconciliation with the opposition was momentary and temporary until the regime got over the shock of President Sadat’s assassination. Mubarak said he would serve as President for one
term only (6 years). But here he is 22 years later.

- When Mubarak, again, conveyed his second message that the judicial supervision of elections in the year 2000 did not mean essentially different electoral results or change of the ruling party or of any rules of the old game.

In response to these clear messages, the Egyptian people decided to leave politics to the politicians and go home. Participation shrank (for example, only 10% of the electorate in Cairo and Alexandria bother to vote in elections). Ruling and opposing remained a privilege of a narrow elite. The ruling elite narrowed the space further for the opposition elite. The radical ones, like the left in the 1970s and the Islamists between the late 1970s and now, have suffered outright repression. The more timid ones have faced another mechanism: say and write what you want … but we will continue doing what we do. Over two decades of systemic stagnation and regression, the opposition elite has lost hope. It is this hopelessness, helplessness and sense of futility that constructed Mubarak’s main mechanism for ruling: by psychology rather than by ideology.

The desperate elite turned against itself. Its voice of criticism and pleas for reform had gone with the wind and it was left to reproduce itself. Some intellectuals and politicians wrote articles and reports identical to those they had written twenty years earlier. Nothing has changed except their own ageing, especially of the spirit. This cloning and photocopying did not extract something original from a sickened elite. There was only a change of form. Instead of standing united to change the very monopolistic framework and its archaic rules, opposition elite elements in Egypt have fallen out with one another and engaged in fratricidal strife. In the narrow space they are allowed, they shout at each other loudly. Another godsend to the pleasure of the ruling elite, which has sensed little concerted pressure for reform.

In such a context modest measures of rectification serve to help the regime survive. It deposed an Interior Minister whom the opposition press caught using a rude language. It sent to court some police officers accused of torture. It also sent to courts some public officials charged with corruption. It even held new elections at the behest of the opposition, or for political expediency as President Mubarak said at the time (after the last massive unified opposition conference of February 5th, 1987). All of this has been ok. But it is not ok, so the regime tells us:

- to change the Constitution.\(^{134}\)

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\(^{132}\) Some almost stopped writing. A case in point is the prominent Professor of Education Said Ismail Ali who wrote courageous articles in the 1970 and the 1980 touching upon taboos like the military establishment.


\(^{134}\) A campaign calling for change of the Constitution was launched by the Opposition parties in 1991 (and was harshly rebuked by the editorial of the official Al-Ahram). See for example in Al-Wafd in 1991: Uthman Husein: This Constitution… Until When? (26.3.) and in July alone see the writings of Tharwat Badawi (11.7.), Mohamed Faeem (13.7.), Ahmed Abul-Fateh (25.7.), Abdel-Aziz Mohamed (25.7.) and Ali Salama – all prominent figures in the opposition. In Al-Shaab see: Helmy Murad: The Writers of the Sultan Precede the President in rebuking the Opposition for Demanding Change of the Constitution (16.7.); Medhat Abul-Fadl: Why the Fear of Changing the Constitution? (30.7.). At the same time the Islamists drafted a Constitution proposal which aroused another debate.
- to elect the President in multi-candidate elections (instead of the uni-candidate referendum).
- to circulate power between political parties, or at least participation in coalition governments.
- to legalise the Moslem Brotherhood and other non-violent Islamists (at least pragmatically to stem the continuing polarisation between them and the state).
- to ensure the neutrality or autonomy of the media.
- to allow complete judicial administration (not partial supervision as permitted in 2000) of elections.
- to reconstruct the power elite, by keeping the army in barracks and allowing a civilian elite to learn to rule (including the election of Governors of the provinces whose bulk comes from the appointment of military men).

To the incumbent regime in Egypt these are the seven pillars of lunacy.\(^{135}\) They are not just measures of rectification but a whole process of reconstruction and reformation. They break through the ceiling and, if implemented, they endanger the regime itself. Indeed, this is the case. It is a way of asking for another regime in Egypt. But that is an issue dependent on internal and external pressures.\(^{136}\) So long as it is left to the ruling elite itself to decide the scope of change, it will remain within the boundaries of rectification and fiercely reject reformation. For the decade to come, the power-brokers of this ruling elite, especially and primarily the President, have already decided the agenda. That is, a categorical No to the first four of the seven points, and some bargaining on the three last points:

- No … to changing the Constitution.\(^{137}\)
- No … to electing the President.
- No … to circulation of power.
- No … to an Islamic party.

Without these major changes, speaking of genuine reform in Egypt is an exaggeration if not a fallacy.

However, regime readiness to bargain over the three other points could be taken as a sign of improvement in regime performance.\(^{138}\) Firstly, at the behest of the satellite media received in Egypt, with its talk-shows and critique of Arab regimes, the media apparatus, led by Safwat Al-Sharif himself, has liberalised somewhat the political debate. But still below a cer-

\(^{135}\) For formulations of reform proposals see for example the aforementioned articles of Salah Essa on the Parliamentary Republic. See also Al-Wafd’s campaign entitled Al-Wafd Opens the File of Political Reform (Series: 13-20, 1999).

\(^{136}\) It is worth mentioning here the lecture of the renowned journalist Mohamed Hassanain Heikal at the American University in Cairo (text at Al-Arabi, 20.10.2002). In it, he contested the continuation of the status quo amidst regional and global storms, warning of the eroding legitimacy of the regime and pleading for fundamental and prompt reform.

\(^{137}\) At the behest of the last confrontation with terrorism the government called for a national dialogue with opposition parties. In this context, views on changing the Constitution were expressed. In the prelude to this Ibrahim Nafe debated the issue (more soberly, this time) with the proponents of constitutional change. See his editorial entitled Dialogue about National Consensus ... Amending the Constitution & Electing the President (Al-Ahram, 26.11.1993). See also: Nabil Abdel-Fattah: Who Fears the Change of the Constitution?, Al-Ahram Al-Arabi, No.137, 6.11.1999.

\(^{138}\) Improving regime performance is the crux of the rationalising articles and studies published at Al-Ahram, under the emblem of its Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. Notably the writings of Abdel-Monem Said, Mohamed El-Sayed Said, Nabil Abdel-Fattah, Gamal Abdel-Gawwad, Diaa Rashwan, Waheed Abdel-Mageed, and others who write on national political issues. See for example their two series: Enhancing Democratic Practice (January 2001) and Reforming the Electoral System (December 2002).
taining, 

By Egyptian standards this is a change reminiscent of the momentary change of 1976 (the TV debates led by the late Gamal Al-Otaifi, which were brought to an abrupt end). It exposes some ills of the regime but still serves it by releasing the tensions and proving the regime’s democracy on this one count at least.

Secondly, there was the judicial supervision of the elections, i.e. the judges holding in their hands the ballot boxes inside ballotting rooms and doing the count and declaring the results themselves. This was executed in the three-tier elections of 2000 after the ruling of the Constitutional Court to this effect. The government took pride in holding elections under complete supervision of judges. In fact, it was only partial supervision. The judges had nothing to do with preparing the electorate’s lists, which were provided as before by the Interior Ministry. They were faulty enough to stop some electors from voting and affect the results. Also, the judges had nothing to do with the outer courtyards and streets where electors of the opposition were beaten and stopped from reaching the ballot rooms. However, by Egyptian standards, this led to another change that affected the results of the first stage of the election: a resounding defeat for the ruling party. The situation was redressed by the state apparatus, especially the police, in the following two stages. In the final count, the ruling party got 38% of the popular vote. But, overnight it became 88% when the Independents who won the vast majority joined or rejoined the NDP. They could have formed a majority-government, or become partners of a governing coalition or at least the opposition to a minority-government of the NDP. Nevertheless, they chose to sustain the single party rule. The judges had nothing to do with that end result. The Egyptian people themselves also have nothing to do with that. As an electorate, and despite all carrots and sticks, they gave the official candidates of the ruling party only 38% of their votes. The culprit is a regime who forced on the country to divorce pluralism half-a-century earlier.

Thirdly, the ruling elite, in general, seems to be bargaining, with itself this time, not with public opinion concerning the media or with the judiciary concerning elections, over the broadening and innovation of its ruling party-elite. This, if it happens as a process not just as an event of holding the NDP Conference in the Autumn of 2002, would affect the Party’s standing before the electorate and public opinion. It would also involve the incorporation of more younger civilians of the growing entrepreneurial and business class whose cause Gamal Mubarak tries to champion. This would somewhat affect the dominant feature of the regime and its ruling apparatus: military men in the army and in important civilian posts, technocrats in the Cabinet, bureaucrats (muwazzafeen) in the executive and in the ruling party itself, and a combination of all these plus local notables and asabiya (clanship) representatives in Parliament. The category of the civilian politician might emerge more distinctively along the process.

Nevertheless, two offsetting factors mitigate the significance of the changes that took place at the conference of the NDP end of 2002. The change in the leadership was beneath the top level. All the big gurus who dominated the Party almost since its inception remained there. The promotion of Safwat Al-Sharif in particular, with his military background was probably designed to placate the military establishment by showing that the basic construct

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139 On a personal note: whenever I was invited to a TV talk-show the broadcaster reminded me that I should not touch the Presidency.

140 It was rumoured in the country at that time that President Sadat said to Dr. Otaifi: This is not the BBC! At present the media establishment is resorting to some academics to prepare and present some TV programs. For example Abdel-Monsem Said and Taha Abdel-Aleem of the Centre of Political & Strategic Studies at Ahram.


of real power would remain intact. The promotion of Gamal Mubarak, too, has hereditary connotations.

For all the success that might have been achieved in innovating the ruling party these are not tantamount to innovating the system. It is, at best, a better party in the same system. Some would argue that improving the performance of the ruling party would affect other parties and the system as a whole. This is a logical argument in principle. But, practically, it might enhance the one-party monopoly given the morbid state of other parties exception being the Islamists (ironically not a legal party). Also, improvement might by the same token lead to reform. The ruling elite remains adamant about non-change of the four taboos mentioned above. The NDP will continue working under this ceiling. It will have to remain the party of the 4 taboos. Adversely, would a renovated NDP champion the cause of reform in the following ways:

- by pleading for a new Constitution?
- by advocating the election of the President (would Gamal or a military man stand amongst other candidates?)?
- by surrendering power to another party or be partner in a governing coalition?
- by supporting the legalisation of an Islamic party (its real competitor in any clean elections; implicitly the NDP would safeguard the cleanliness of elections even if it loses them)?

This may sound like day-dreaming in the Egyptian context. For some it is still a possibility, albeit remote and miraculous (after all the Chinese Communist Party is about to be the Chinese Capitalist Party). But for the time being let the terms be set right. In Egypt, we speak of improvement and rectification...not of restructuring and reformation.

3.3.3. Succession and Accession
The Egyptian people, offspring of ancestors who pioneered human civilisation some seven thousand years ago, have enjoyed the freedom to elect their rulers for some 7 years only in those millennia. They may have condoned (with votes in referenda) or even loved (with demonstrations and in funerals) some of their rulers. But this happened a posteriori, after those rulers had already come to power. Egyptians did not elect them a priori, except for the exceptional seven years (the total term of several short governments formed by the Wafd Party, after exceptionally clean elections in the liberal era of 1924-1952). From Pharaohs to Emperors (Greco-Roman) to Walis (envoys of the Islamic Khaliphs) to Khaliphs (Fatimids rightly in Cairo which they established in 969 A.D.) to Sultans (Ayyubids to Mamluks) to newer Walis (of Ottoman Sultans) to Khedives and newer Sultans (of autonomous Egypt under Turkish title) to Kings (of 20th century independent Egypt) to Presidents (Naguib-Nasser-Sadat-Mubarak: the four officer/presidents to date), it is the same linear story of exclusively un-elected heads of state (as well as mostly un-elected Prime Ministers too). Are the Egyptians going to choose their president freely for the first time in their history at this early point in the 21st century? Or will this be deferred to a later point in the century? Or will it never happen, having been engraved by a tradition of thousands of years?

No need for speculation here. Since few inside and outside Egypt are asking the question: How? But everyone is eager to know: Who? Some may also have the luxury to ask: Why? These questions can be answered analytically rather than speculatively.

As regards the question “how do Egyptians have a head of state” the answer is axiomatic.

144 There were rumours in the country about establishing a new party (The Future Party) to be led by Gamal Mubarak (see: Waheed Abdel-Mageed: Future Party or Youth Organisation, Al-Wafd, 27.7.1999). More rumours exist about splitting the NDP into two parties.
They do not elect him (or her?!) as they have done (?) over the long historical trajectories mentioned above. They condone the one candidate of the 2/3 parliamentary majority with a vote of Yes in a referendum. So far, they have never said No (put aside the real turnout at polling stations). So, what will happen next time will be a replica of the festivities before and during the referendum. Then, there will be the routine glorification of the winner, whoever he is, in the media (if he is not another Hero of October War he has to be made hero of something else: Champion of the Youth, for example). Press articles glorifying the newcomer may have already been written by loyalist journalists, awaiting only the filling of his name in the empty space. This is no cynicism…it is reading from past experience.

Since President Mubarak did not appoint a Vice-President for 22 years the question as to who would then be the President is being posed in earnest. The question why a particular person is subsidiary to knowing his name, his background and the real power that brought him to the top position. To answer these two intertwined questions let us check certain quarters at play.

Objectively, there are 4 parties concerned with the issue of succession and accession to the Presidency in Egypt: 3 are actors and 1 is a spectator. They come in the following order:
- President Mubarak himself, in particular, and his ruling elite, in general.
- The military establishment, in particular – being the core of the ruling elite.
- The US – being the sole super power with vested interest in Egypt, especially with its present war against terror (to a lesser degree other international actors like the European Union and, to a larger degree again, regional powers with Israel in the lead).
- The Egyptian people: the spectator! (this includes the intellectual and political opposition elite, which is a commentator).  

Subjectively, there are 4 candidates: 2 possible and 2 probable. They come in the following order:
- President Mubarak remaining himself in power a 5th term (no surprise … power is a glamorous temptation…Bourguiba stayed in power in Tunisia in his 80s despite age and health).
- A last-minute appointment of a Vice-President (must be a military man in this case. Sadat could not appoint a civilian although he began to reduce the power of the military in the political system; Mubarak reintroduced military features).
- After Mubarak’s departure and with no Vice-President: A militaryman is proposed by the Army Command and condoned by Parliament, ruling party and everybody else in the regime. This could be: the Defence Minister, the Chief-of-Staff or the Commander of one of the army’s main divisions, especially the Air Force Commander. The Naval Force and the Intelligence are included. If the army commanders disagree amongst themselves, they will prefer to keep the army’s unity by insisting on a civilian politician with military background. In that case he will also be a leading figure in the NDP. There are two known figures for that qualification: Safwat Al-Sharif, Secretary-General of the NDP, and Zakariya Azmi, Secretary-General of the Presidency.
- A purely civilian politician to be nominated by the NDP with the army’s tacit consent.

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145 See for example: Anouar Al-Hawwari: Egypt & the Crisis of the Republican System, Al-Hayat, 27.4.2000; Ibrahim Darwish: But...What is after Mubarak?, Al-Wafd, 13.7.2000; Ali Said & Noha Al-Bahnasawi: The Absent Vice-President, Al-Arabi, 8.4.2001. A young man published a book, interviewing nine intellectuals and politicians of different shades, on this issue: Mohamed Fakhri: Who rules Egypt after Mubarak?, Cairo, 2001. See also our remarks with regard to consistency: Egypt should become either a Constitutional Monarchy (Al-Arabi, 18.6.2000) or remains a Republic whose President is elected directly by its people in multi-candidate elections, at least to keep the façade even Iran managed to keep, that is, if not on principle and respect of the nation (a lecture at Cairo International Book Fair, Jan. 2002).
The Presidential Guard must be part of the consensus but not stop the first-ever civilian from entering the Presidential Palace. The intelligence service must primarily be in the consensus and co-ordinate its military/civilian interactions.

In exploring further the last probability of a civilian acceding to the Presidency for the first time in Egypt, it is clear that the strongest candidate is Gamal Mubarak himself. But this will have to be with the consent of the army. If there is no such consent he will not be able to accede, unless having become a Vice-President to a military man. Mubarak enhanced the prospects for his son, not just by letting him rise swiftly in public life and in the ruling party leadership, but also by not imposing him on the army. This is the logic of the vacant position of Vice-President. The Presidency of Egypt is still the army’s privilege or discretion!

The problem for analysts is that we do not know what is in the minds of the army’s leading men, although we know and see what President Mubarak and his son are doing. Gamal is already a de facto president running the country alongside his aging father. But he cannot be a de jure President unless the army does want or accept that. As for President Mubarak, he did his best to train and promote his son. He also cleared the way of other civilian competitors like the popular Amre Moussa, who was put in the prominent position of secretary-general of the Arab League, but that is distant from the core power elite in service. In a word, Mubarak left the way open in two ways: for a comrade-in-arms/barrack-mate or for the younger son (there is little mention now of the elder son who got his promotion in business not in politics, but by politics). He could leave it open to the last leg of his last term and decide on an opportune moment to ask Parliament for a new nominee while he is still in control. MPs would almost certainly do it Syrian-style; flocking in to nominate his son. How would Mubarak (the Russian-trained Air-Bomber) sell this Russian Yeltsin/Putin trade-mark to the other MPs (Military Primates)? Again, analysts do not know what is in the minds of plotting politicians.

What matters to Mubarak in the end is the non-incrimination of his reign after his departure, i.e. to keep the files closed: commissions, transactions, corruption, torture, rigging etc. This can be served by his son as heir-President or as partner in power after his father’s departure. It could also be served by a military colleague as President with little pressure to open the files. It is hereditary in either case.

If anything can tip the choice either way, it could be the U.S. and its preference. Both sides in this Egyptian episode have good cards to play with the Americans: the army is the ultimate guarantor of the stability of Egypt and its region, which is what the Americans want…and Gamal is well-market to the Americans as the energetic young civilian of the nouveau entrepreneurial class with global views and business interests in the US itself. A combination of both might be the American preferred prescription for Egypt. They might also suggest another Egyptian/American civilian, Dr. Ahmed Zuwail, the prominent scientist with massive popularity in the country for being a Nobel Laureate. If, hypothetically, the Americans insist on presidential elections with several candidates standing, this would require a Constitutional amendment. A caretaker president would oversee this process. He could be the Speaker of Parliament in his ex officio capacity as Interim President. Or, another behind-the-scenes accord might bring another caretaker for a short interim term. This would be an elderly senior politician. For example Dr Mostafa Khalil (ex-Vice President of the ruling NDP) or even Dr Boutros Boutros Ghali (ex-Secretary General of the UN). Why not? Is it not all hypothetical?!

No matter who becomes the next President of Egypt, G1 or G2 or G3 (a General or Gamal or a Galloper) or even an angel, the fact remains that Egypt’s political system is sick and
requires a larger and effective prescription to cure it before it is too late.\textsuperscript{146} In the absence of a nation since the political system reduced it to a spectator of its own destiny, and of an alternative modernist democratic elite, there remains in Egypt two last actors other than the clinging non-reformist regime: Islam and Uncle Sam. The global battle between these two might imprint the domestic politics of Egypt with further features of Islamisation and Americanisation. This polarisation might give the incumbent regime, as a buffer-mediator, a new lease of life. But this would be the post-September 11 aspirin that would not cure the original disease. In the long run, the curing doctor must be the Egyptian people themselves.