

The Egyptian Revolution May Produce a Lebanon-Type Islamic Regime

Пише: Alan M. Dershowitz

петак, 04 фебруар 2011 13:00



No one can confidently predict the outcome, both short and long term, of the events now unfolding on the streets of Cairo and Alexandria. One is reminded of Zhou Enlai's answer to the question whether the French Revolution succeeded: "It's too soon to say."

The short time outcome in Egypt may be the introduction of some structural democracy in the form of fairer elections. But the real test will be whether structural improvements will bring about real functional democracy—freedom of speech, assembly, press, religion and dissent. This will take more time to assess.

There are models for good outcomes, bad outcomes, as well as for in-between results. The paradigmatic horrible outcome was, of course, the structural democratic election of 1932 in Germany which brought to office Adolf Hitler who quickly ended any semblance of functional democracy. An in-between result is the Philippines, where there is more democracy than under the previous dictatorship, but not nearly as much as there should be. The good outcomes have mostly been in Europe, following the fall of the Soviet Union.

The Mubarak administration has always conjured up the spectre of an Iranian style Khomeini result, in order to frighten those who wanted to replace him. Now Mubarak's critics, as well as many in the media, have challenged this straw man, pointing out the considerable differences between current Egypt and Iran 40 years ago. They are right. Iran is not an appropriate analogy. But neither is the Philippines nor the Czech Republic. The closest analogy may be Lebanon.

Both Egypt and Lebanon have strong middle classes. They both have influential Christian minorities. They both have secular traditions. And they both have a well organized and well funded radical Islamic group vying for power and determined to turn the country into an Islamic theocracy.

There are important differences as well. The Egyptian army is strong, while Lebanon's is weak. And the Lebanese Islamic group has a strong militia, armed and financed by Iran, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood has little military support behind it—at least at the moment. But it is allied with Hamas, which is right across the porous border with Gaza.

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The following scenario is possible, if not likely. Mubarak will leave. Someone like Mohamed ElBaradie, the Nobel Laureate who ran the International Atomic Energy Agency, will serve as an interim leader. He is supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, and, in turn, he has said nice things about the Brotherhood. On Sunday, he told Fareed Zakaria the following:

“You know, the Muslim Brotherhood has nothing to do with the Iranian model, has nothing to do with extremism, as we have seen it in Afghanistan and other places. The Muslim Brotherhood is a religiously conservative group. They are a minority in Egypt. They are not a majority of the Egyptian people, but they have a lot of credibility because all the other liberal parties have been smothered for 30 years.

They are in favor of a federalist state. They are in favor of a wording on the base of constitution that has red lines that every Egyptian has the same rights, same obligation, that the state in no way will be a state based on religion. And I have been reaching out to them. We need to include them. They are part of the Egyptian society, as much as the Marxist party here. I think this myth that has been perpetuated and sold by the regime has no - has no iota of reality.”

This Pollyannaish description of the Muslim Brotherhood is misleading and incomplete at best and totally unrealistic at worst. The Muslim Brotherhood is a violent, radical group with roots in Nazism and an uncompromising commitment to end the cold peace with Israel and replace it with a hot war of destruction. Its very name undercuts ElBaradie claims that “every Egyptian has the same rights” and that “the state in no way will be based on religion.” Christians, women, secularists and other dissenters will not have the same rights as Muslim men. Right now the Brotherhood “are a minority,” but they are the largest and best organized minority, and they don’t play by the rules of democracy, using assassination and threats of violence to coerce support.

ElBaradie is their perfect stalking horse—well respected, moderate and compliant. He will put together a government in which the Brotherhood begins as kingmaker and ends up as king.

This will not produce functional democracy. Nor will it preserve peace in the region. The first casualty may well be the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority will be emboldened by the prospect of a powerful military ally on Israel’s border. The Israelis will be reluctant to surrender any more territory if they can no longer count on peace

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with Egypt (and perhaps with Jordan).

The second casualty will be religious freedom for Egyptians, particularly Christians, but also secularists.

I have visited Egypt on several occasions, most recently a few months ago. Compared to other repressive dictatorships I have visited over the years, it was a 5 or 6 on a scale of 10 for the average Egyptian. The hard question is will it get better or worse. "It's too soon to say." My best guess is that it will get better for some and worse for others.

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