

The fall of Mubarak: the failure of survival strategies

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Just as the durability of the Hosni Mubarak regime against several odds had surprised most observers of Egyptian politics, its sudden fall as the result of massive protests astonished the world. The regime that had weathered an Islamist insurgency, economic upheavals and a host of other socio-political challenges over a period of three decades collapsed in the face of youth-led peaceful protests that started on January 25 and forced Mubarak out of power on February 11, 2011. This study tries to explain the fall of the Mubarak regime.

Building on Curtis R. Ryan's argument about the survival strategies in the Republican Egypt, namely *containment*, *repression* and *external diversion*, this study tries to explain how they were employed by the Mubarak regime and how their failure in addressing long term political and economic challenges caused secular erosion of regime legitimacy. As the grievances of the Egyptian people continued to accumulate over the years, the regime was in constant danger of falling.

What made the regime particularly vulnerable was the change in demographics with youth having come to constitute almost a third of Egyptian population. Frustrated with the shrinking political and economic space and equipped with modern tools of communication, they were all set to take on the regime. The events in Tunisia provided the much needed trigger and the millions of Egyptians came out demanding "isqat al-nizam," "the fall of the regime." Their ability to sustain pressure on the regime made the military – the main guarantor of the regime - force Mubarak out of power.

To set the theoretical background, this study first explains Rayan's argument about survival strategies in Republican Egypt. It then discusses in detail two basic elements of Mubarak's strategies – political liberalisation and economic reforms - in order to show how these strategies failed to address political and economic aspirations of the majority of the Egyptians. Amidst the rising public disenchantment with the regime, cracks had started emerging within the ruling junta with the military, which Mubarak had built as the main guarantor of regime

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survival, looking askance at the prospects of a hereditary succession in favour of Muabarak's son – Jamal.

So when the massive public demonstrations put unrelenting pressure on the regime, the military chose to side with the public, forcing Mubarak out of power. This phenomenon of withering regime cohesion is discussed next. Then comes a brief description of the events surrounding Mubarak's ouster and the challenges his legacy has thrown up for Egypt's post-Mubarak political dispensation. Concluding remarks follow.

Survival strategies in Republican Egypt: explaining the argument

Curtis R. Ryan, an American political scientist, in an article published in 2001, identified consistent patterns in the strategies of survival employed by the three presidents of Republican Egypt – Gamal Abd al-Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat and Husni Mubarak. Ryan grouped these strategies under the concepts of *containment* (actions aimed at controlling, absorbing or deflecting pressures made on the executive), *repression* (actions involving coercion and the use of force against opponents of the government) and *external diversion* (actions that aim to turn public attention away from unresolved problems in the economy and the society).¹

Ryan maintained that since stability and government survival in Egypt has been attained more through short term survival strategies than through success in long term development planning, they have had limited impact on otherwise ambitious plans for development and change. Such strategies, he further argues, “may sow the seeds for the growth and perpetuation of security states, with correspondingly limited potential for political liberalisation or democratisation in developing countries.”²

When discussing the strategies of the Mubarak regime, Ryan argues that Mubarak attempted to earn legitimacy and regime survival by trying to contain political pressures through *greater political liberalisation, economic reform and strengthening the military as the key supporter and guarantor of the regime*.³ Mubarak did use, when necessary, coercion in order to maintain his government. However, Ryan further argues, he has been less inclined toward dramatic moves on the international stage.⁴

It is against this backdrop that the following section of the study would discuss how Mubarak's failure to effect genuine political liberalisation, introduce economic reforms beneficial to the majority of Egyptian people

and maintain cohesion among the ruling elite of which military was the dominant part paved the way for his ouster.

Political liberalisation: an unfulfilled promise

As mentioned earlier, greater political liberalisation was part of Mubarak's strategy to contain pressures on the regime. In the early phase of his rule, he did take some steps which appeared to have been "designed to turn the wheels of governance from authoritarianism to democratisation",⁵ thereby raising hopes of greater political opening and winning him considerable goodwill from most segments of Egyptian population. Subsequently, however, he failed to build on the momentum generated during this early phase. Rather, the second decade of his rule saw most of the political liberties constrained amidst excessive resort to oppressive measures. During the third decade too the pendulum kept oscillating between liberalisation and oppression.

The first major steps towards political liberalisation in the Republican Egypt were taken by Mubarak's predecessor, Anwar al-Sadat. The most significant of them were to abandon the single party system established after the 1952 coup and to hold competitive multiparty parliamentary elections in 1979.

Even when Mubarak appeared inclined towards liberalisation; his policies were more a "regime-supporting political decompression" than a genuine thrust towards more participatory governance. The cumulative effect of these policies was such that towards the end of his reign, politically, Egypt had become a one-dimensional society where there was no true alternative to the existing ruling establishment.⁶ The vast majority of the Egyptian people, therefore, were alienated from the regime.

The following section discusses these arcs of liberalisation and de-liberalisation in a bit more detail. Since a comprehensive discussion of the political developments during Mubarak era is beyond the scope of this study, the following discussion focuses on the successive parliamentary elections not only because of their huge political significance but also because they mainly defined these arcs of liberalisation and de-liberalisation.

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significant of them were to abandon the single party system established after the 1952 coup and to hold competitive multiparty parliamentary elections in 1979. Generally, two considerations are said to have pushed Sadat towards this policy: desire to accommodate conservative elite preferences for greater political space in order to move beyond the leftist support base enjoyed by Gamal Abd al-Nasser; and to effectively make a transition from the Soviet orbit of influence to becoming an ally of the US by introducing a more liberal political system.⁷

Having assumed office in the wake of Sadat's assassination, Mubarak continued with this policy of political liberalisation. He not only continued with the multi-party politics but took it further by allowing more intense forms of contestation than had been permitted under Sadat. The first parliamentary elections during Mubarak presidency were held in 1984 which were considered by many to have been fairly-run.⁸ These were the first in Egyptian history to have been conducted according to the proportional representation electoral system. The 1987 elections too were remarkable in the sense that they saw a significant increase in opposition's representation in the parliament: the opposition share of the elected seats in the parliament rose from 13% in the 1984 elections, to 22.32%, while the number of seats held by the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) decreased from 87 to 77.78%.⁹

Besides, there were other steps that raised the hopes of further easing of political restrictions: Mubarak released political prisoners and allowed national press greater freedom to criticise government functionaries. Non-governmental organisations grew by the thousands, while professional syndicates emerged as alternative fora for debate and protest. Even more importantly, the regime showed considerable restraint in using force against its opponents. All these developments were interpreted by many as the regime's willingness to cede political space. One early 1990s report from the U.S. Agency for International Development encapsulates this optimism:

The Mubarak government . . . clearly prefers to use the tactic of repression sparingly, and by regional standards, successfully limits its recourse to "the stick." Whether from calculation or conviction, the government is committed to a process of consultation with important social actors and of political reform. The government's style, in marked contrast to that of its predecessors, has been one of consensus building.¹⁰

The decade of 1990s, however, constituted a break from the patterns visible during the 1980s. The regime frequently resorted to oppressive

measures to curtail the political space available to the opposition. Military courts were extensively used not only to try the Islamist militants but also the elements of non-violent political opposition. Laws were enacted that made it difficult for the political parties and professional syndicates to operate outside government influence. Press too came under enhanced restrictions. Most observers of Egyptian politics came to believe that President Mubarak had reversed the course of liberalisation that he had earlier set on.¹¹ The situation was aptly summed up by an observer: “If any form of “freedom” has been expanded in Egypt, meanwhile, it has been the freedom of the presidency from the informal constraints that earlier limited his authority....Overall pluralism has declined markedly since the outset of his rule.”¹²

The circumstances surrounding the parliamentary elections held in 1990 and 1995 amply highlighted the de-liberalisation trend that had come to define the Egyptian political reality. The December 1990 elections that were forced by a court ruling declaring 1987 election laws, and therefore the parliament elected under those laws, unconstitutional, were boycotted by the main opposition parties – al-Wafad and the Islamic Alliance, accusing that safeguards against government-sponsored electoral rigging were insufficient. The elections, instead of broadening the spectrum of political forces represented in the Egyptian parliament, resulted in a larger majority for the NDP than the party had had in 1987.¹³ However, the low voter turnout (less than 50 percent) showed that most of the Egyptians did not believe in the regime’s narrative about democratisation.¹⁴

The political gerrymandering and fraud reached unprecedented levels in the 1995 elections. The state apparatus was deployed to ensure success of maximum number of NDP candidates, while their competitors were subjected to several legal restrictions and harassments. The official support for the NDP candidates ranged from the use of public sector vehicles to the collusion of state officials appointed to run the polling stations. Partly through direct interference and partly by condoning the activities of the NDP candidates, the regime managed to get a parliament elected in which NDP obtained 94 percent of the seats - its largest majority ever.¹⁵

Why Mubarak preferred *repression* over *containment* during this phase? Generally, the historians have identified three factors that pushed Mubarak towards abandoning his reconciliatory policies in the favour of oppressive ones. Foremost among these was the fight against the Islamist insurgents. From 1990 till 1997, Egypt witnessed a low-level war of attrition between the authorities and revolutionary Islamists, like al-Jama’a

al-Islamia and Jihad, resulting in about 1300 casualties.¹⁶ Mubarak regime acted against these insurgents with full force, killing and capturing thousands of Islamists. The campaign, however, did not target insurgents only: Moderate Islamists too were meted out the same treatment. Worse still, the campaign provided the excuse for the regime to curb many civil liberties and reverse the liberalisation programme it had followed during the 1980s.

Second important reason was to curb the opposition to economic reforms that the regime had undertaken. In 1991, the government signed agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank which put in place programs of macroeconomic stabilisation and structural adjustment. These reforms targeted increasing productivity and competitiveness based on deregulation, including the gradual liberalisation of foreign trade, the privatisation of public sector companies, and an increase of the role of the market in resource allocation. However, at least in the short run, these reforms threatened the living standard of a large segment of the Egyptian society and entailed material losses for many of them.¹⁷ Coercion, therefore, was deemed to be the preferred option to deal with those segments of society whose interests were threatened by economic reforms and who could have opposed them.

The last decade of the Mubarak regime too was characterised by a “one-step forward, two steps back” approach towards political liberalisation. The initial moves towards liberalisation came after the “reluctant reformer” in Mubarak felt assured that his regime had defeated the Islamist insurgents and that the economy had recovered from the worst initial effects of macroeconomic stabilisation.

Third important consideration was to neutralise the more liberal and participatory amendments to the electoral law imposed by the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC). The SCC, in 1987 and in 1990, had declared legislation that had governed the preceding parliamentary elections as unconstitutional. On both these occasions, the government had to dissolve the parliament and call new elections under amended legislation that gradually reduced regime control over the election process and, ultimately, over the results.¹⁸

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“reluctant reformer” in Mubarak felt assured that his regime had defeated the Islamist insurgents and that the economy had recovered from the worst initial effects of macroeconomic stabilisation.¹⁹ These moves were also in response to the calls for political reforms from the regime’s main ally – the Bush administration. Besides, there was domestic pressure for the reforms. Beginning in 2003, public protests over the second Palestinian intifada and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq had morphed into rallies directed at Mubarak and his associates.²⁰

The first “step-forward” was the 2000 parliamentary elections. These were the first in the country’s history to have been held under complete judicial supervision, after a court ruling which gave the judiciary supervisory authority over the elections.²¹ The NDP, as usual, won an overwhelming majority – 388 of the 454 seats. This amounted to 87.8 percent; down from 94 percent of the outgoing assembly.²²

Though the election fell far short of international standards of transparency and fairness, they were deemed to have marked a positive step towards greater political liberalisation in Egypt. Judiciary’s role was of key importance in establishing whatever credibility the elections could have. According to one observer; “Through the institution of judicial supervision, members of the SCC and others in the judiciary exercised significant independence from the regime’s designs and broke the pattern of non-competitive elections that had developed over the previous decade.”²³

The high point of this episode of political liberalisation was Egypt’s first multicandidate presidential elections which were held in September 2005 after an amendment in the constitution was approved by the People’s Assembly and then confirmed in a nationwide referendum on May 25, 2005. Though the amendment did not deliver the political sea change, it did introduce an element of real political competition in presidential race. According to the election results, Mubarak garnered 88.6 percent votes while twice-elected Member of Parliament, Ayman Nour finished second with 7.6 percent of the national vote.²⁴

The new system was seen as a major improvement upon the previously in-place indirect presidential election process, in which a candidate was nominated and confirmed by the NDP-controlled People’s Assembly and then approved in a nationwide “yes or no” referendum. With the past four referendums without a competitor routinely resulting in Mubarak receiving anywhere from 93% to 98% “yes” votes, the process was widely viewed at home and abroad as illegitimate.²⁵

The hopes engendered by the first multicandidate presidential elections were reinforced by the parliamentary elections held in December 2005. The US pressure for political reforms and the enhanced role for judiciary in overseeing elections convinced many elements in the opposition that participating in the elections would not be as futile a political exercise as it used to be. The change in local political milieu, most notably the emergence of Kifaya movement which had pushed the boundaries of free expression also was a reassuring factor. The circumstances surrounding election campaign were positively different from the previous elections. “The campaign itself saw freer discussion and media coverage, limited but real willingness to accept some domestic monitoring, discrete arrangements for international observers, and the creation of at least the form of an independent election commission.”²⁶

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As expected the NDP secured overwhelming number of parliamentary seats but its 311 seats were far short of 388 it had obtained in 2000 elections, though it still enjoyed comfortable majority in all significant matters. The most surprising aspect of the election results was the performance of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) which obtained a total of 88 parliamentary seats, by far the strongest showing by an Egyptian opposition party in half a century. This represented a six-fold increase over their seventeen seats in the previous elections.²⁷

The relatively freer campaign environment and the election results rekindled hopes of Egypt’s movement towards democratisation. Such was the optimism prevalent in the wake of 2005 parliamentary elections that one of the observers predicted not only a political sea change coming in Egypt but also hoped that its strides towards democracy could make Egypt a regional role model: “In the struggle for domination of local political arena, the elections are likely not only to instigate a significant change in power relations between the Egyptian regime and its opponents, but could also possibly become a model for reform in other Arab countries.”²⁸

These hopes too, however, foundered, and that too very quickly. Frustrated by the developments in Iraq and alarmed at the success of the MB, the US had abandoned its rhetorical insistence on democratic reforms

in Egypt and the wider Middle East. Mubarak, now, therefore, could crack down on the opposition without any fear of alienating his foreign supporters. Ayman Nour, his main rival in presidential election, was the first target of the autocratic wave that followed the 2005 parliamentary elections. He was first harassed by the state security and then robbed of his seat in parliament through electoral chicanery. On December 24, a regime-friendly judge convicted him on orchestrated forgery charges and sentenced him to five years of imprisonment.²⁹

The main target of this autocratic wave was the MB whose strong showing in the parliamentary elections was far more than the regime was willing to tolerate. The state security apparatus was unleashed against the organisation, targeting particularly its leadership. An unrelenting wave of arrests kept its leaders and many of its financiers in and out of prisons on various charges. Its candidates for the municipal council elections in 2008 were not even allowed to register.³⁰

One major step aimed at curtailing the political space available for the opposition was the amendments in the 34 articles in the constitution, which were approved in a referendum, held on March 26, 2007. One of the amendments, removed judges from direct supervision of polling; instead, lower ranking public servants were to be entrusted with running polling stations under the supervision of an electoral commission and the Ministry of Interior.³¹ This constitutional engineering went a long way in constraining the opposition particularly the MB and ensuring the continuation of NDP's power.³² Amnesty International described the amendments as the greatest erosion of human rights in Egypt since 1981.³³

It was against this backdrop that Egypt headed towards 2010 parliamentary elections which were held under extremely repressive circumstances and turned out to be among the most rigged during Mubarak's regime. The level of fraud during the elections was "breathtaking", according to the *Guardian*.³⁴ The NDP secured an astounding 83 percent majority of seats in the parliament, winning 420 seats, 90 more seats than it had in the last parliament which constituted a 21 percent increase in its representation. The most surprising aspect of the election results, however, was the depletion of MB's representation in the parliament as it could not win any seat.³⁵ It needs to be recalled that the MB was the largest opposition group in the outgoing parliament

The 2010 elections, therefore, removed any doubts about the intents of the Mubarak regime, if there were any. Seen by the public as the culmination of regime's exclusionary politics, they made it abundantly

clear that elections under Mubarak were never meant to create an arena of genuine political competition: Instead, they were meant to serve as an arena for clientelist co-optation and recruitment into the political realm.”³⁶

Since the parliament’s composition was to be the sole determining factor as to who would run for the 2011 presidential elections, the opposition-less parliament appeared to have set stage for the hereditary succession. Even more ominous aspect of the election results was that they convinced the Egyptian people that they could not bring about any political change through normal political channels. A massive public mobilisation was thus the only option left for them to claim the political space that legitimately belonged to them.

Mubarak did succeed, for a considerable period of time, in keeping the popular demands for greater political space in check but, ultimately, they resulted in a groundswell of popular resentment that not only brought about an ignominious end to his regime but also shattered his dream of passing on the baton to his son.

The above discussion clearly shows that whichever steps Mubarak took towards political liberalisation and how much forceful his rhetoric in this context might have been, all this was part of a survival strategy aimed at absorbing the pressures on the regime rather than constituting a genuine move towards sharing political power with the people. Through these strategies Mubarak did succeed, for a considerable period of time, in keeping the popular demands for greater political space in check but, ultimately, they resulted in a groundswell of popular resentment that not only brought about an ignominious end to his regime but also shattered his dream of passing on the baton to his son. Worse still, his legacy is hampering healthy political development even after his departure from Egypt’s political scene.

Economic reforms: breakdown of social contract

Economic liberalisation was the other survival strategy employed by Mubarak to perpetuate his regime. Like political liberalisation, economic liberalisation too had been initiated during the Sadat era and was continued to be pursued by Mubarak regime. And much like the political liberalisation, economic liberalisation too turned out to be a failed project. Though it did result in improvement of some macro-economic indicators, its cumulative impact worsened socio-economic reality for the majority of the Egyptians, rupturing the social contract enacted under President Nasser. As the state-society relations became weaker, and due to the

worsening economic conditions of middle class people, laborers and, more importantly, the majority of the youth, a “social explosion” against the Mubarak regime had been in the making for quite some time, which, when unleashed, brought the regime down.

The state-society relations in the republican Egypt have been governed, to a large extent, by the social contract enacted by President Nasser whereby the regime implicitly pledged that if the people muted their demands for political enfranchisement, it would provide them with social and welfare services in the form of government employment; subsidies for food, energy, housing and transportation; and free education and health care.³⁷ These guarantees were underwritten by the Egyptian Constitution adopted in 1971. The result of this social contract was the restructuring of the Egyptian economy which now followed a state-led industrialisation model whereby the public sector became the main engine of growth and was responsible for the major part of new investments and employment. The state spent heavily on public infrastructure and social services, and engaged in land reform.³⁸

This policy, however, could not usher in an era of sustained economic growth. Though, initially, economy fared well; in the subsequent years, due to a variety of factors, notably large military expenditures and the effects of the wars of 1967 and 1973, it could not sustain high rates of growth. According to World Bank data, average growth declined from 7.52 percent during the period from 1959/1960 to 1964/1965 to 2.85 percent during the period 1964/1965 to 1973.³⁹ The policy, nevertheless, spawned a constituency comprising public sector managers and unionised workers who seemed ready to defend Nasser’s heritage, as well as a mass public which had been taught it was entitled, as part of a social contract, to populist benefits.⁴⁰

As the failure of Nasser’s policy became evident, his successor, Anwar al-Sadat, turned a new page in the Egyptian economy in 1973 when he launched *Infitah* or Open Door Policy which sought to open up the economy to foreign investment and inter-Arab joint investment venture, as well as to roll back state’s role and promote the role of private sector in the economy. The cornerstone of the new policy was Law No. 43 which was promulgated in June 1973. The Law allowed tax concessions for foreign private firms in the form of tax holidays, exemptions from labor laws, import/export licenses, and exchange rate control regulations.⁴¹

However, even under the Open Door Policy, state’s role dominated the economy as the Nasserite constituencies would not let the government roll

back populist benefits they had acquired under the social contract. This became evidently clear in January 1977 when, under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the government proposed raising food prices which caused popular riots break out in Cairo, forcing the government abandon these procedures and remove subsidies gradually.⁴²

It is interesting to note that at a time when the regime had decided to stake its future on the private sector and was attempting to disinvest in the public sector, state recruitment was accelerating and the amount being spent on subsidies was rising. From 1974/75 to 1985/86, for example, direct and indirect subsidies on essential goods, electricity and petrol rose from LE661 million to LE2.2 billion, or 7 percent of GNP and 28 percent of state's current expenditure. Likewise, between 1977 and 1981, the volume of manpower employed by the state rose by 29.6 percent, four times the population growth rate.⁴³ However, this policy too "fathered" a new class comprising mainly of the entrepreneurs, professionals and high-salaried employees of the private economy, who managed to accumulate considerable political and economic power.⁴⁴

Thus, when Mubarak came to power, he was confronted with these two classes whose economic interests clearly diverged. And throughout the 1980s he remained occupied with balancing the legacies of Nasser and Sadat and reform initiatives remained caught between the contrary interests generated by them.⁴⁵ However, as the pressure for economic reforms mounted, Mubarak regime embarked on a series of policy measures starting in 1991 which carried the Open Door Policy to its logical end. With sustainable economic growth their prime target, these policies sought to reduce the role of state in the economy through reform efforts including privatisation and liberalisation. Adoption of market-based economic principles and the increase in the global integration of the Egyptian economy were the other top priorities of these reforms.⁴⁶

The most significant aspect of these reforms, at least from the perspective of this study, was the changes they brought about in the social contract. The reforms, undertaken at the behest of IMF and the World Bank, concentrated more on macroeconomic and financial reforms and less on the social and structural problems, thereby worsening the living conditions of the poor millions as no attention was paid to mitigate the negative side effects of reform in the daily life of ordinary Egyptians.⁴⁷

The literature on the Mubarak era economic policies identifies three aspects that particularly contributed to social deterioration: rising income poverty, declining consumer purchasing power and worsening labour

market scenario, particularly for educated youth. According to estimates provided by the UNICEF, the number of people living in absolute poverty had continued to increase, reaching 23.4 percent in 2008-09, up from 19.6 percent in 2003-04. According to other statistics, from 2000 to 2005, all measures of absolute poverty were found to have increased: the incidence of poverty increased from 16.7 to 19.6 percent, the depth of poverty from 3.0 to 3.6 percent, and the severity of poverty from 0.8 to 1 percent.⁴⁸

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The reform era also saw a significant decline in the consumer purchasing power which was evident in the rising consumer price index (CPI) which, in August 2008, reached the unprecedented level of 23.6 percent. The rise in CPI was mainly due to soaring food prices. The inflationary trend observed over the last decade has had a disproportionate effect on the Egyptian people, particularly on the middle and lower income groups, as a large share of their income would get spent on food. One indicator of social tensions generated by this inflationary trend was the food riots in April 2008, which claimed 11 lives.⁴⁹

The third negative aspect of economic reforms was the worsening labour market situation which showed that the economic policies adopted by the Mubarak regime did not have much positive impact on job creation. Although unemployment decreased in Egypt between 1998 and 2006, most of the jobs were created in the informal sector (informal employment increased from 57 percent in 1998 to 61 percent in 2006) where workers were paid lower wages, lacked social security coverage, were hired without social security contracts and were therefore more exposed to the risk of poverty. A still more disturbing aspect of labour market situation was the dramatic deterioration in prospects for the youth. It is instructive to mention here that the university graduates were the only education group which experienced a drop in employment during the said era. From 1998 to 2006, unemployment among graduates increased from 9.7 percent to 14.4 percent.⁵⁰

And to cap all these problems, the social welfare system in Egypt was shrinking. Over the last decade, public expenditure on social services was cut across most areas. Public spending on education, for example,

declined, from 19.5 percent in 2002 to 11.5 percent in 2006, as a percentage of total expenditure, and from 5.2 percent to 4.0 percent, as a percentage of GDP. In particular, public funding for university education suffered a significant reduction in recent years.⁵¹

Ironically, the common Egyptians were experiencing such hardship at a time when they were being told by their government and the international financial institutions (IFIs) that the Egyptian economy was working wonders. And these claims were not entirely unfounded. In 2007, Egypt boasted real gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 7.1 percent; 7.2 percent in 2008; and a 4.7 percent rate of GDP in 2009 (Given the global economic downturn in 2009, even a growth rate of 4.7 percent was remarkable).⁵² Besides, other macro-economic indicators improved. Exports and foreign direct investment flows increased at a rapid speed. Egypt, in fact, was among the fastest growing economies in the Middle East and its performance prompted the IMF to praise it as “an emerging success story”.⁵³

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The reforms introduced by the Mubarak regime, it becomes clear, did bring about some improvements in the economic sphere. Their failure, however, lied in the fact that they could not distribute the benefits of these improvements among the common people. The majority of the common Egyptians, therefore, could not identify themselves with the economic strategy of the regime. Rather, they blamed these strategies for most of their economic problems. At the same time, as these reforms were enriching at least some segments of society, they created the feeling of relative deprivation for most Egyptians. Relative Deprivation is a phenomenon where individuals or groups subjectively perceive themselves as unfairly disadvantaged over others perceived as having similar attributes and deserving similar rewards.⁵⁴

The sense of economic deprivation coupled with the shrinking political space seems to have created an environment in Egypt where people were ready to go to any length to get rid of the regime whom they blamed for most of the problems inflicting their country and society. These feelings brought millions of Egyptians out onto the streets who finally forced

Mubarak out of office. But the outpouring of exasperation resulting from socio-economic and political grievances succeeded in toppling the Mubarak regime mainly because the main guarantor of the regime – the Egyptian military - choose to side with the people rather than with the regime. This phenomenon is explained below.

Estrangement of the military: withering elite cohesion

As Rayan puts it, Mubarak's efforts to ensure his own survival also involved bringing the military back in. While his predecessor, Sadat, had made conscious efforts to subordinate the military and demilitarise the state, Mubarak restored its privileged position and welcomed it as a full partner to his regime. As a result, military, once again, became the sole guarantor of the regime's survival.⁵⁵ Military leadership acquiesced even in Mubarak's subsequent efforts to curtail military's direct and dominant political role in exchange for guarantees to ensure its privileged position within the polity.⁵⁶

During the latter years of Mubarak regime, however, the rise of Jamal Mubarak and his clique within the ruling NDP is believed to have ruffled military leadership's feathers as the economic agenda espoused by Jamal and his associates was deemed detrimental to military's corporate interests. As the prospects of a hereditary succession in Jamal's favour became stronger, the military leadership was further upset as was the "old guard" within the NDP. Against the backdrop of this withering elite cohesion, as the massive protests broke out in Egypt, calling for Mubarak's ouster, the military announced not to use force against fellow citizens. As the protests refused to die down despite Mubarak's efforts, and the death toll from the protests continued to grow, the military, fearing the damage to its own legitimacy and interests, broke with Mubarak and forced him to leave office.⁵⁷ The following lines discuss this phenomenon in detail.

Ever since the military came to power during the Free Officers' overthrow of the monarchy in 1952, it has been the most important and the dominant institution in the country. From Nagib to Mubarak, all four presidents in Republican Egypt had military background. In the aftermath of 1952 military take over, political parties were banned and all key decisions were taken by the Revolutionary Command Council. Military officers controlled key posts and represented a strategic minority: presidents, vice presidents, prime ministers, and crucial ministers.⁵⁸ However, as the Sadat era political liberalisation paved the way for multiparty elections, the military respected the wishes of political

leadership and withdrew from participation in active politics.⁵⁹ One indicator of this declining role of the military was that the proportion of those in the cabinet with military backgrounds dropped from 66% in 1967 to 22% in 1972 and 15% in 1975.⁶⁰

As far as Mubarak's policy towards the military is concerned, it was dictated by the twin considerations of curbing any challenge from within the security apparatus and from the Egyptian public at large. This, however, led to paradoxical policy choices. On the one hand, knowing that only the military could remove him from power, he sought to maintain absolute control over all aspects of security establishment and pursued policies that further limited military's political role. On the other hand, fully cognizant of his lack of public support and genuine political legitimacy, he relied heavily on military and sought to cultivate it as the "most powerful constituency in Egypt, garnering its loyalty through extensive military spending".⁶¹

Mubarak ensured that the military's corporate interests would be safeguarded. It was the result of this approach that over the years, military's business interests expanded, and by 2003, Egypt's defence industry employed more than a 100,000 people and contributed about \$500 million a year to the gross domestic product.

To realise the goal of limiting military's role, Mubarak followed a three-pronged strategy. He tried to balance power-relations within Egypt by creating a counter-weight to the military. This is why he heavily invested into strengthening the Central Security Force (CSF) into a paramilitary force of more than 300,000 men.⁶² He successfully tried to tighten his grip over military affairs and succeeded in building a tight security grid around his regime consisting of several military and paramilitary actors who in a constant competition for power ensured that neither would become too powerful. He replaced overly ambitious officers such as former Defence Minister, Abu Ghazalah, by low-profile and trusted officers.⁶³ Besides, Mubarak tried to build for himself a public support base by continuing with the political liberalisation that had been initiated under Sadat.

On the other hand, Mubarak ensured that the military's corporate interests would be safeguarded. It was the result of this approach that over the years, military's business interests expanded, and by 2003, Egypt's defence industry employed more than a 100,000 people and contributed about \$500 million a year to the gross domestic product. What made the

military truly independent was the fact that all of the income from its activities reverted to its own coffers and was off budget. And to keep the military happy, the individual interests of the officer corps were also taken care of. They enjoyed higher salaries and better housing, transportation and medical facilities. Above all, the officers benefited from direct ties to the private sector and from payoffs and bribes when they were involved in procuring weapons systems.⁶⁴

Thus the military, despite curtailment of their overt political role, was happy with the regime and willing to protect it against internal threats as was evident when they intervened to crush the rebellion of the CSF in 1986 when the latter had revolted over the issue of pay. Military also displayed its willingness to stand up to any potential threat to the regime posed by the militant Islamists.⁶⁵ Imad Hrab has succinctly summed up the regime-military relationship: “It is thus evident that the relationship between the military and the Egyptian regime is one of reciprocity. While the regime looks out for both corporate and individual military interests, the military uses its stature and power to support the regime.”⁶⁶

This relationship, however, came under stress with the rise of the “new guard” within the NDP ranks. The “new guard” referred to businessmen affiliated with Jamal Mubark. They espoused an economic course that benefited the business elite and restricted the role of the state within the economy. This hurt the interests of the old guard of the NDP, whose most important source of power had been the state, including the inflated public sector and bureaucracy. The leading members of the old guard resisted the rising influence of the “political businessmen” who intensively supported Gamal Mubarak’s political career.⁶⁷ The military too resented the agenda espoused by the new guard which it feared would eventually limit military’s power and its many economic and other prerequisites. Besides, there were many connections between the military leadership and the members of the old guard. The latter’s diminishing role within the ruling junta was therefore an unwelcome development for the military.⁶⁸

The elite cohesion came under further stress as the perception grew stronger that Mubarak was grooming Jamal as his successor. The military’s displeasure over the prospects of hereditary succession was no secret. Even one of the *Wikileaks* reported US Ambassador to Egypt writing to his government that the Egyptian military would be a “major obstacle” in the face of the succession of Jamal Mubarak and may stop his rise to presidential office.⁶⁹

Thus the elite cohesion that underpinned the regime throughout its existence was withering at a time when the socio-economic and political grievances of the people had weaned them away from the regime to the extent that they were willing to take it on come what may. And as the public mobilisation showed no signs of relenting, the military – so far the main guarantor of the regime survival – threw its weight behind the public and forced Mubarak to quit.

Post-Mubarak Egypt: coping with the legacy

Rayan's argument that survival strategies that prioritise regime survival over long term socio-economic and political development can sow the seeds for the growth and perpetuation of security states with limited potential for political liberalisation or democratisation is instructive also in understanding the post-Mubarak political dynamics in Egypt. All three elements of Mubarak's survival strategies are posing challenges for Post-Mubarak developments in Egypt.

In the post-Mubarak Egypt, the divergent views of the secular political parties and the Islamist MB about the future course of Egyptian politics appear to be the most explosive issue. While the former want to slow down the electoral timetable and prioritise the writing of a new constitution, the latter want to proceed expeditiously to elections in order to end the military rule. The secular parties fear that if elections were held in September 2011, the better organised MB and the remnants of now outlawed NDP could take advantage because of their history of presence in the political arena. They therefore want that elections should be held after the writing of the new constitution. They hope, in the meanwhile, they can better organise themselves. Incidentally, these elements are those which had spearheaded the movement that brought the Mubarak regime down.⁷⁰ Both the parties have brought out huge processions to bring home their points, underlining Egypt's precarious political situation.

This precarious situation is mainly the result of the way Mubarak manoeuvred politics during his reign. Mubarak had never allowed independent political actors to emerge. Rather, he used elections as a means to identify regime opponents, who were to be dealt with iron hands, and those docile political actors who could be co-opted. The religiously motivated MB, though, was able to maintain its presence but no other independent political entity was allowed to grow. It is due to this fact that the forces that toppled Mubarak regime have yet to coalesce into a unified political entity or block and therefore see themselves at a disadvantageous position vis a vis the established political forces. Any political

developments that did not take into consideration the interest and aspirations of these forces could pose serious challenge for the political stability in post-Mubarak Egypt.

Mubarak's economic policies had resulted in impoverishing a vast majority of the Egyptians. These people were at the forefront of the movement that toppled him. Now with the new dispensation, they can legitimately hope that their economic conditions will improve. But given the history of economic reforms in Egypt, it remains a tall order. More so because of the accompanying political uncertainties which would make the task even more difficult.

However, the biggest challenge for the post-Mubarak Egypt remains the dismantling of the security state that Mubarak had built. Under Mubarak, military had become the strongest institution of the country, and that was why it had to intervene to save the situation. Though, at that time, the Egyptians welcomed the military intervention now they want the military go back to the barracks. However, it is highly unlikely that the Egyptian military will acquiesce in a relegated role for itself which does not guarantee that it would be able to protect its corporate interests. Earlier, the Egyptian military had acquiesced in a less prominent role for itself but mainly because a former military man occupied the presidency. But in the changed circumstances, it would assert to reserve for itself a key role in national affairs. Reconciling the civil-military equation, thus, would be another major challenge for the post-Mubarak Egypt.

Conclusion

An overview of the various strategies that Mubarak employed to prolong his rule shows that though such policies can buy some time for the authoritarian rulers they end up weakening both the states and the societies at large. Through coercion and manipulation, an authoritarian ruler can squeeze the space for independent political actors but only at the expense of alienating the masses and eroding their confidence in the efficacy of normal political channels to negotiate state-society relations in a manner not prejudicial to societal forces' interest. Since the societal forces don't grow accustomed to sorting out differences in a transparent arena, the post-dictatorial phase throws up even greater challenges as the hopes of different streaks of societal forces diverge and they find it increasingly difficult to reach at a consensus as to the future shape of the polity. The Mubarak saga also illustrates that the economic policies that don't benefit the masses and end up enriching a small segment of society, particularly those with close linkages with the ruling elite, ultimately lead to the

downfall of the regime. Besides, building a particular institution while failing in winning over the masses cannot ensure the survival of the regime because when chips are down no national institution would cling to an autocrat whom people hold responsible for their miseries.

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