

Radicalization in Light of the Developments in Egypt: Challenges to Effective International Cooperation

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Background

In the decade after 9/11, many countries perceived terrorism and especially Islamic terrorism as one of the main threats to national and international security and stability.¹⁶ The Greater Middle East was perceived as a region where Al Qaeda and similar organizations had the strongest foothold.¹⁷

Numerous factors, including Iran's 1979 revolution and conversion into a theocratic state and the Taliban's coming to power in Afghanistan in 1996, created the impression that other countries in the region without a strong ruler or regime could easily fall into the hands of radical Islamic forces. Consequently, the international community chose to look at many authoritarian regimes of the region as partners or allies in the fight against radicalization and terrorism.¹⁸

¹⁶ One example of this attitude can be seen in this quote from Christopher Bennett: "A day after hijackers flew commercial airliners into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, the Allies responded by invoking Article 5 of the Washington Treaty for the first time in the Alliance's history. And by agreeing that a terrorist attack by a non-state actor should trigger NATO's collective self-defence obligation, the Alliance had, in effect, mandated itself *to make combating terrorism an enduring NATO mission.*" "Interpreting Prague: Combating Terrorism," *NATO Review*, Spring 2003, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2003/issue1/english/art2.html/>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

¹⁷ Evidence of this view can be found in many places, such as the *Wikipedia* entry on Al Qaeda, which includes this passage: "Others, however, see Al-Qaeda as an integrated network that is strongly led from the Pakistani tribal areas and has a powerful strategic purpose. ... Al-Qaeda has the following direct franchises: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which comprises Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia; Islamic Jihad of Yemen; Al-Qaeda in Iraq; Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb; Harakat al-Shabaab Mujahideen in Somalia; Egyptian Islamic Jihad; Libyan Islamic Fighting Group." "Al-Qaeda" in *Wikipedia*, (last modified Dec. 3, 2011), <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011). And from another article, "Former CIA analyst Michael Scheuer, who led the CIA's hunt for Osama Bin Laden, states that terrorist attacks—specifically Al Qaeda attacks on America—are not motivated by a religiously-inspired hatred of American culture or religion, but by the belief that U.S. foreign policy has oppressed, killed, or otherwise harmed Muslims in the Middle East." "Islamic Terrorism," in *Wikipedia*, (last modified Nov. 30, 2011), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_terrorism, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

¹⁸ According to Alvis Armellini, "As it was mentioned by the Enlargement commissioner, Stefan Fule said the EU should reach out to 'the crowds in the streets of Tunis, Cairo and elsewhere' rather than interact 'with dictators who are, as we speak, spilling the blood of their own people with utter disregard for human life. We must show humility about the past ... Too many of us fell prey to the

Hosni Mubarak's Egypt was an active member of the international community in the fight against terrorism, and Egypt is a major non-NATO ally to the United States.¹⁹ Egypt was a natural ally in the war against terrorism as the country had long been targeted by terrorist groups. Various radical organizations acting in the country include what experts say is Al Qaeda's direct franchise, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and Egypt has been the target of terrorist attacks at least seven times since 2001.²⁰ Due partly to these reasons, Western financial and military support of Egypt and particularly Mubarak's regime was substantial. Egypt for many years received more than one billion dollars annually from the U.S., making it second only to Israel in the amount of foreign aid provided.²¹

Expectations and the Reality

Naturally, when unrest began in Egypt in 2011, many observers expected it to lead to a confrontation between secular forces in Egypt's ruling group and Mubarak's regime, who would attempt to maintain the stability of the country, and pro-Islamic, radical groups, who would push Egypt toward radicalization and instability.²² However, the reality appeared different.

assumption that authoritarian regimes were a guarantee of stability in the region,' he told the European Parliament. ... His words echoed EU President Herman Van Rompuy's frank admission that the West had turned a blind eye to Mubarak's autocratic ways because he was a key moderating influence in the Middle East peace process. ... 'Until just a few weeks ago, Egypt was certainly not an issue, certainly not in terms of human rights. People preferred stability,' Van Rompuy said last month." Alvise Armellini, "EU preparing fresh North Africa policy, but can it deliver?," *Monsters and Critics*, March 2, 2011, http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article_1623194.php/ANALYSIS-EU-preparing-fresh-North-Africa-policy-but-can-it-deliver, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

¹⁹ "Major non-NATO ally (MNNA) is a designation given by the United States government to close allies who have strategic working relationships with US armed forces but are not members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. ... Initial MNNA's were Australia, Egypt, Israel, Japan, and South Korea." "Major Non-NATO Ally," in *Wikipedia*, (last modified Nov. 29, 2011), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_non-NATO_ally, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

²⁰ Egypt has been a target of terrorist attacks at least seven times since 2001: 2004 Sinai bombings, April 2005 terrorist attacks in Cairo, 2005 Sharm el-Sheikh attacks, 2006 Dahab bombings, 2008 Sudan kidnapping, 2009 Khan el-Khalili bombing, 2011 al-Qidiseen church bombing. See "Terrorism in Egypt," in *Wikipedia*, (last modified Oct. 4, 2011), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism_in_Egypt, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

²¹ Curt Tarnoff and Larry Nowels, "Foreign Aid: An Introductory Overview of U.S. Programs and Policy," *Congressional Research Center, Report for Congress* (last updated April 15, 2004), retrieved from <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/31987.pdf>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

²² Ilan Berman writes, "According to a Pew opinion survey of Egyptians from June 2010, 59 percent said they back Islamists. Only 27% said they back modernizers. Half of Egyptians support Hamas. Thirty percent support Hezbollah and 20% support al Qaida. Moreover, 95% of them would welcome Islamic influence over their politics... Eighty two percent of Egyptians support executing adulterers by stoning, 77% support whipping and cutting the hands off thieves. 84% support executing any Muslim who changes his religion. ... Egyptian values, in other words, are far from liberal—even if some of the protesters currently out in the streets might be. This, of course, runs counter to the idea that has taken hold in many quarters: that the end of the Mubarak era will inexorably lead to democracy in the heart of the Arab world. But numbers don't lie; Egyptian society as a whole is both religious and deeply conservative." Ilan Berman, "What Egyptians Want: Not Western-Style Democracy," *Forbes*, Feb. 2, 2011, <http://blogs.forbes.com/ilanberman/2011/02/02/what-egyptians-want-not-western-style-democracy/>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

Protesters in the streets were ordinary people who demanded democracy, freedom, and the abolishment of the dictatorship of Mubarak's regime.²³ Radical Muslim forces had almost no role in the protests. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was considered the biggest and best-organized group opposing Mubarak's regime, initially did not even support the protesters. When they finally joined, their position could hardly be seen as seeking specific Islamic objectives.²⁴

At the same time, the local government, which initially was considered as a guarantor of peace and stability, began aggravating the situation: radical groups of civilian "Mubarak's supporters," or more precisely, radical groups of plainclothes security forces, began attacking peaceful protestors—throwing the whole country into a violent confrontation, while law enforcement personnel did nothing to avoid mass violence. As a result of these clashes, many peaceful Egyptian citizens were killed and wounded.²⁵ Due to the government's "neutrality" and because many of the radicals attacking peaceful demonstrators turned out to have police and security agency ID cards,²⁶ most observers believe the radical groups attacking peaceful demonstrators were orchestrated by Mubarak's police and the security structures.²⁷

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²³ "Grievances of Egyptian protesters focused on legal and political issues including police brutality, state of emergency laws, lack of free elections and freedom of speech, uncontrollable corruption, as well as economic issues including high unemployment, food price inflation, and low minimum wages. The primary demands from protest organizers are the end of the Hosni Mubarak regime, the end of emergency law, freedom, justice, a responsive non-military government, and a say in the management of Egypt's resources. Strikes by labor unions added to the pressure on government officials." "2011 Egyptian Revolution," in *Wikipedia*, (last modified Dec. 1, 2011), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_revolution_of_2011, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

²⁴ "The refusal of the Muslim Brotherhood to join the demonstrations at the beginning (it only joined them when they started to succeed! ... led many to perceive it as a group of political opportunists. The Muslim Brotherhood had no other option but to arrange a few separate insignificant parallel demonstrations. It is important to note that the prayers that were held during the protests represented a common ritual level of Islam rather than an ideological movement belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood," Tawfik Hamid, "Playing Chess with the Muslim Brotherhood," *The Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 07, 2011, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=207251>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011). Or see Heba Fahmy, "Muslim Brotherhood Reconsiders Refusal to Participate in Jan 25 Demo," *Daily News Egypt*, Jan. 20, 2011, <http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/egypt/muslim-brotherhood-reconsiders-refusal-to-participate-in-jan-25-demo.html>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

²⁵ "By 1 February, the protests had left at least 125 people dead, although Human Rights Watch said that UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay claimed that as many as 300 people may have died in the unrest. This unconfirmed tally included 80 Human Rights Watch-verified deaths at two Cairo hospitals, 36 in Alexandria, and 13 in the port city of Suez, amongst others; over 3,000 people were also reported as injured." Retrieved from the Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. "2011 Egyptian Revolution," in *Wikipedia*, (last modified Dec. 1, 2011), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_revolution_of_2011, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

²⁶ The *Toronto Star* showed photos with this explanation: "I.D. cards of members of the Ministry of the Interior police force that anti-government protesters say they confiscated from pro-Mubarak militias they captured—along with weapons—during violent clashes Wednesday night" along with a story by Sandro Contenta, "We Have Proof Mubarak Orchestrated Clashes, Protesters Say," *The*



Pro-government demonstrators, bottom, and anti-government demonstrators, top, clash in Tahrir Square. Source: AP ²⁸

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Toronto Star, Feb. 03, 2011, <http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/933158--we-have-proof-mubarak-orchestrated-clashes-protesters-say>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

²⁷ "Violence escalated as waves of Mubarak supporters met anti-government protesters, and some Mubarak supporters rode on camels and horses into Tahrir Square. The clashes were believed to have been orchestrated by Habib El Adly, and there were hundreds of casualties. ... Incidents of violence toward journalists and reporters escalated amid speculation that the violence was being actively aggravated by Mubarak as a way to end the protests." "2011 Egyptian Revolution," in *Wikipedia*, (last modified Dec. 1, 2011), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_revolution_of_2011, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

²⁸ "500+ Injured in Violent Cairo Clash," *Daily Telegraph*, Feb. 03, 2011, <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/mubarak-supporters-battle-protesters/story-fn6e1m7z-1225999180242>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

As the revolution in Egypt unfolded, it became evident that this was not the battle that had been expected. This was NOT Mubarak's regime attempting to guarantee the peace and stability of the country and the region, while battling radical Islamic groups and a radicalized population trying to push the country toward confrontation and instability. In fact, it would be more accurate to say the battle came to be between ordinary people who were calling for freedom, democracy, and stability, against the Mubarak regime, which manipulated radical forces and pushed the country toward radicalization.

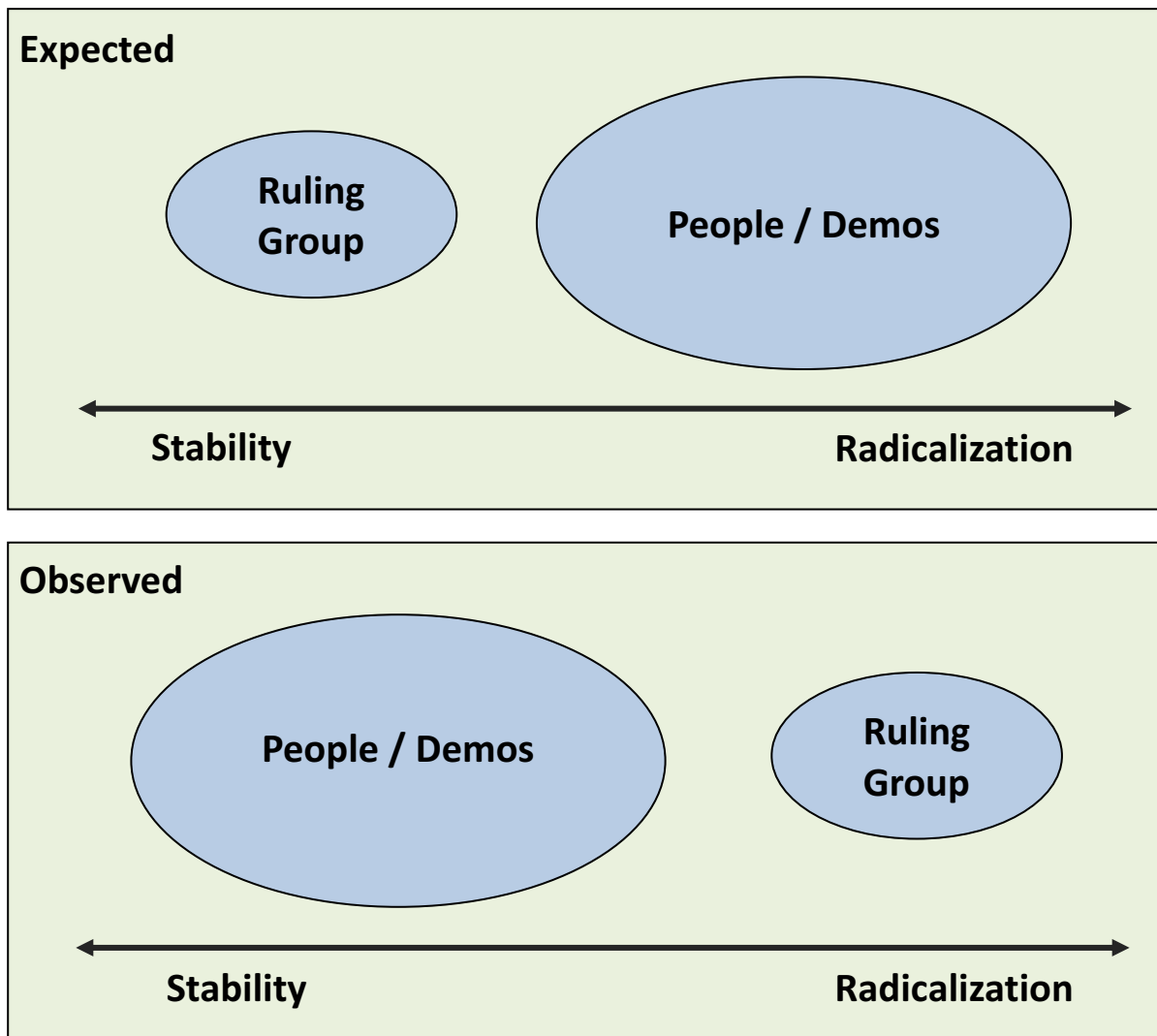


Figure 1. Expectations before the unrests in Egypt were that Mubarak's ruling group would be a guarantee of peace and stability, while the population of Egypt was perceived as primed for radicalization. In reality, during the unrest, Egypt's population appeared to be inclined to peace, stability, and democracy, while Mubarak's regime became a factor of radicalization and instability.

Necessity for Strategy Change

The difference between the expectations and the reality in Egypt (and in the Middle East in general)²⁹ should prompt the international community to devise a new strategy and a new approach to combat radicalization and strengthen the stability of the region. Old strategies based mainly on supporting the usually corrupt ruling group should be modified or abandoned. Instead, the international community should think about new strategies which could be oriented more to support the whole society (e.g., via civil society organizations), rather than only the local ruling groups.

According to the new strategy, the international community should direct its main efforts toward increasing the local population's capability to withstand radicalization—or to withstand the radicals. Such support could be a part of wider efforts to strengthen the local society's ability to achieve democratic transformation and development. This approach would oppose the methods used by the authoritarian system that encourages ordinary citizens to feel responsible only to those in the ruling group (clergy, royal family, dictator, ruling party, etc.) and not to care about the future of their country or society.

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Recent events have demonstrated that creation of media and communication platforms that are independent and free from the control of authoritarian regimes and radical groups' control can make an impact in the fight for democracy. Making the societies of the Middle East part of a wider international community through Facebook, Twitter, and other networks could decisively influence the region's fight for democracy and safety from radicalization.³⁰

²⁹ In the case of Libya, Gaddafi forces behaved just as did forces in Egypt; initially Gaddafi tried to blame violence on the opposition linked with radical Islamic forces (see "Gaddafi Blames Osama Bin Laden for Protests," *BBC News*, Feb. 24, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12570279>), (accessed Dec. 5, 2011). Later, Gaddafi's government declared that it had established an alliance with Islamic forces and intended to convert Libya to an Islamic state ("Qaddafi's Son Says Regime Is Forging Alliance With Radical Islamists," *Fox News*, Aug. 04, 2011, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/08/03/qaddafis-son-says-regime-is-forging-alliance-with-radical-islamists/>), (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

³⁰ "In the case of Egypt it really played a critical factor in getting out the word on how to organize. ... There was one group in Egypt that was one of the key groups in getting people out on the street. ... Last week in a matter of days they went from 20,000 fans to 80,000 fans. ... We can see that these sites were used in order to get the word out about how to bypass checkpoints, how to get across bridges, how to get to places where people wanted to demonstrate. So it was a critical tool in getting people out into the streets." "Uprising in Egypt; Mubarak Shuts Down Al Jazeera," *CNN Transcripts*, Jan. 30, 2011, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1101/30/rs.01.html>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

Latest Developments and Final Remarks

Continued clashes with government forces in Egypt, as well as the advancement of Islamic parties in recent parliamentary elections show that Egypt's civil society so far has not been able to create the ideological platforms necessary to move from protests toward active political work. Although Egypt's civil society quite clearly expressed that it would no longer accept the dictatorship in Egypt and was able

to force Mubarak's withdrawal from power, Egypt remains in a period of transition that may be long and difficult before it will realize the aspirations of the January 2011 revolution³¹ and prove able to form institutions which will preserve the country from the threat of radicalization. From this point of view, strengthening international cooperation with civil society groups in Egypt (which is the recommendation given in this article) looms even more important.

The pattern just described does not seem only to reflect the situation in Egypt, but also in most of the states of the Middle East where the local regimes and radical groups tend to treat their own people as a threat to their power rather than as a source of power. This attitude creates the background for radicalization. Even when well-known leaders like Mubarak are removed, the situation in these states will not improve at once, as it will require time to completely replace old ruling structures with new democratic institutes.³² This too is why more specific plans and approaches relevant to the new reality of supporting the democratic aspirations of local societies is of the highest importance, and will be for a long time to come.

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³¹ Mohamed El Baradei, a Nobel Prize laureate and Egypt's top reformist leader, said, "We'll have to keep fighting ... the revolution is still a work in progress." Sarah El Deeb and Marjorie Olster, "ElBaradei: Egypt Vote 'Decimated' Liberals," *Time*, Dec. 04, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2101473,00.html#ixzz1fwlu54it>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011). Practically the same thought is expressed by Emad El-Din Shahin, Henry R. Luce Associate Professor in his article where he describes the Nov. 22–26, 2011, Cairo clashes and the background of the conflict. See "Why Egypt Needs a Second Revolution," *CNN*, Nov. 23, 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/11/22/opinion/shahin-egypt/index.html>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

³² It is true that the 2011 revolution opened the door for changes, but in Egypt old state institutions are still functioning, and change will require a lot of time and serious effort from both Egyptians and Egypt's international partners (e.g., see George Friedman, "The Distance between Enthusiasm and Reality," *STRATFOR*, Feb. 14, 2011, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20110213-egypt-distance-between-enthusiasm-and-reality>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011). Also see Barry Rubin, "How Much in Egypt Has Really Changed? Less Than It Seems," *American Thinker*, Feb. 12, 2011, http://www.americanthinker.com/2011/02/how_much_in_egypt_has_really_c.html, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011). From the structural point of view, revolution in Egypt is not yet finished and the continued demonstrations of Egyptians is a proof of this fact. See, Al Pessin, "Protesters Say Egypt's Revolution Far From Finished," *Voice of America*, July 15, 2011, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/africa/Protesters-Say-Egypt's-Revolution-Far-From-Finished-125664003.html>, (accessed Dec. 5, 2011).

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