

Commentary

21 February 2011

Egyptian Alignment: President Hosni Mubarak Resigns

Andrew Milroy
andrew.milroy@instituteleap.org

“Canadian support for Egyptian transition into a fully functioning deliberative democracy would be best if done in a development assistance framework, and only after Egypt meets several criteria which include that the transition is monitored to international standards, and that a clear sign of its desire for this transition is seen.”

As Egypt goes through a transition into a more inclusive deliberative democracy and away from that of the over thirty year rule of Hosni Mubarak, nearly all parties involved and siding with democracy would align themselves with the peaceful resignation of President Mubarak. What that looks like and over what period of time it may take is of a different issue but given a number of factors as mentioned by Yasser El Shimy in Egypt's Struggle for Freedom, the country had reached a point (of lack thereof) developmentally whereby a change was inevitable. As he writes, with a population projected to reach 100 million by 2020, 23% of the population on \$2 a day or less, and a majority of the population under 30, this critical mass of unrest was bound to occur. With globalization it should not be surprising that it was a youth led movement, in fact initially organized largely online, which has spurred into existence this political restructuring of the Egyptian political system.

A position aligned with the resignation of President Mubarak in the attempt to modernize the gov-

ernment through democratic process, is one which is endorsed by the Right Honourable Stephen Harper and a position which I would support. In stating that he respects the President's decision to step down, the Prime Minister is clearly pushing forward a national agenda of peaceful democratization for the country.

Importance however, must extend beyond support or alignment with the Egyptian protests for democracy to one which plays a more advisory role as transition occurs, so that while President Mubarak has stepped down and handed control over to the military, a progressive change is made or at a minimum outlined. Professor of Political Studies at the University of Toronto, Professor Janice Stein has recently stated during a CBC Broadcast that although the autocratic ruling of more than 30 years is coming to an end, the shift of power has not yet passed that of the military. Despite elections projected to take place in nearly six months time, such elections are historically lopsided (arguably seen as corrupt although usually

taken as one step removed from such classification) and it is speculated that during the months ahead with Mubarak out of the country, the military leaders will acknowledge change and find a suitable although more moderate replacement which can be groomed in short time. Importantly then are not the first democratic elections, although would be held under the watchful eye of the international community and a good sign of movement in the right direction (something akin to Afghan elections), but those which follow. Transitioning into a working democracy does not constitute an election or a mere vote.

Respecting Hosni Mubarak's resignation is so neutral in nature as to not align oneself with it would be mysterious. It is more of a respectful nod owed as diplomatic courtesy between national leaders than an agreement with anyone particular policy stance or sign of international alliances. Going beyond this however, into further discussions which support an Egyptian process of democratization is the harder question. How far is Egypt going to go with democracy, and how quickly? How much influence should Canada try to exert in this process and in which diplomatic channels should this be achieved?

If what lays ahead for Egypt is in fact a fully functioning democracy, then support for it by Canada should be made clear from the start and consistent throughout. I would support this statement if the following condition can be met; that the resignation was done as a sign that the old way of governing in Egypt has ended (even if only at this point in time in spirit), rather than a passing of the baton. Progress to democracy it could be strongly argued, is not consistent of swapping one military backed leader to another. While this maintains stability for the short-term it does not lead to democracy in the long-term.

In looking for national stability and extending that to the Arab world, the slow and steady transition into a democracy should be the aim. However, the issue of how much foreign national intervention is warranted or desirable on behalf of Canada is a vital decision point needing to be made. Based

upon the role for which Canada is currently playing in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as a development oriented investor, a similar position should be kept for the case of Egypt. It is where Canada has the most experience, is internationally renowned for, and offers a far safer image from those within the country and region. For support to be given though there needs to be several signs which I would argue must be given and a process followed and agreed upon prior to beginning or aligning oneself with a more active development engagement strategy.

With the President's resignation a clear sign was shown that the people of the country, particularly the vast youth demographic, can be heard and has influence. In this, a glimpse of democracy albeit in its barest form was seen. For formulation of Canadian diplomatic strategy, the desire on behalf of those currently in power must be made clear. Although the elections which are to come will be an additional step in the right direction, the process and candidates themselves must be thoroughly checked and monitoring to international standards established. If for instance the baton is passed rather than the voice of the people heard, there would be little in need of change in the immediate regarding how international relations would need to be conducted. Alignment therefore with the transition to democracy would be a safe and neutral international position to maintain, while more information is retained and the future direction of the country along with how relations with neighbours become known. Once results from the first election are concluded and reports disseminated, a crucial indicator of the ruling Egyptian mentality would be a comparative analysis between the new President elect verses Hosni Mubarak. Furthermore, prior to a sizable shift in foreign relations with the country, an additional comparative analysis between the electoral process itself as conducted in six months time, with those in the coming years would indicate whether the democratic process is being fully supported, e.g. are investments made in promoting the democratic process, or is Egypt going to be democratic only in name. Thus, a first step of alignment with supporting a transition to democracy in Egypt

would be through support of mandating a strong monitoring process such that crucial information can be made known.

Once Egypt has clearly shown that investments are being made to strengthen the democratic process then this should be taken as a clear national sign of long-term commitment. That Egypt truly wants to become democratic although recognizes it will take considerable time. The signs would be that they are actively enabling increasing numbers of people to vote and encouraging them to do so in an educated fashion, along with allowing only political strategies which are not overtly threatening. Several candidates must be shown as viable alternatives, none of whom have substantially more support from the military than others. The last one being important as there should be a clear delineation between the military and the government with the former taking order from the latter. With this power structure in place, developmental assistance from Canada would have a stronger impact as in such contexts it is known that corruption is lower. Additionally, foreign experts offering ad-

visory services are listened to more readily without fear of national sovereignty being eroded or seen as weak.

When Prime Minister Stephen Harper made the statement that he respects the decision of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to step down and allow for a transition to begin, it was undoubtedly given with sincerity. Although it could not easily be said to be a clear indication of any international policy shift, nor meant to indicate as such, it is a statement which to distance oneself from would be entirely unwarranted and potentially harmful politically. More into it however, the question as to whether there should be alignment with Egypt's transition to a democracy is one which I would recommend an alignment with. Canadian support for Egyptian transition into a fully functioning deliberative democracy I have stated would be best if done in a development assistance framework, and only after Egypt meets several criteria which include that the transition is monitored to international standards, and that a clear sign of its desire for this transition is seen.

Founded in 2009, **InstituteLEAP** is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan, and internet-based research network. At InstituteLEAP the pursuit of academic knowledge is not only viewed as an end in itself, but also a vehicle for transformation towards a better and more just global community. InstituteLEAP is an open and decentralised intellectual platform promoting interdisciplinary dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Steered by early career social scientists interested in economic development, global governance, Asian public affairs, and international law, InstituteLEAP is a young and energetic institution with great potential for development in the future.

InstituteLEAP Commentaries present the latest findings and perspectives offered by our members on current public and international affairs. InstituteLEAP is a meeting place of ideas. Members contribute and share their research with others in order to promote the interdisciplinary study of public and international affairs and facilitate intellectual debates.

Think and Change.

InstituteLEAP means The Institute of Law, Economics, and Politics and/or its subsidiary and affiliated organisations. This research can be copied, photocopied, duplicated and/or redistributed provided that clear and proper references are given to the source. Privacy statement and disclaimer are available at www.instituteleap.org.

Copyright © 2011, The Institute of Law, Economics, and Politics. All Rights Reserved.