

CPD statement on Egypt

Category: U.S. Foreign Policy

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The Campaign for Peace and Democracy issued the statement below about the democratic revolution in Egypt.

Egypt After Mubarak

Statement by the Campaign for Peace and Democracy

February 14, 2011

The Campaign for Peace and Democracy joins millions around the world in celebrating the great victory of the Egyptian people, whose unyielding courage and steadfastness succeeded in forcing Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak to resign from office. The inspiring democratic revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt — as well as the protests in Jordan, Yemen, Algeria, Bahrain, Iran and other neighboring countries — attest to the truth of CPD's conviction that popular movements from below for justice and democracy have the potential to challenge the most seemingly invulnerable rulers. We enthusiastically support such movements, whether in countries whose governments have been allied with the United States, or in countries like Iran that are in the crosshairs of the U.S. imperium.

For decades it was widely assumed that the Mubarak dictatorship was one of the world's most solidly entrenched. The Egyptian people, suffering from massive landlessness, impoverishment, and unemployment, were seen as paralyzed by fear and passivity. But that perception changed virtually overnight after the Tunisian Revolution, which electrified Egypt, as well as the rest of the Arab world. Starting on January 25, day after day, for more than two weeks, Egyptians returned to the streets and the squares in ever greater numbers. Few popular uprisings in recent years have matched Egypt's in terms of sheer dogged determination. The people could not be cowed, they refused to be driven back; instead it was they who drove back the vicious police and Mubarak's paid thugs. A historic victory has been won, but much more needs to be done to assure freedom and democracy for Egypt. What has been accomplished, however, is enough to justify many times over the people's proud slogan: "Lift up your head; you're an Egyptian."

In fact, while Tunisia may have provided the inspiration, the revolution in Egypt did not erupt out of nowhere. In Egypt, as in many countries in North Africa, millions of young people were increasingly discontent, not only because of the dearth of employment possibilities, but because they were chafing at the harsh authoritarianism that constricted them culturally, politically and socially. Moreover, since 2006, the ground for protest had been prepared by a wave of strikes, some of them massive, against low wages and horrendous working conditions (click here to see CPD's open letter of support to Egyptian workers in April 2010.). Workers' action paved the way for the overthrow of Mubarak in more ways than one. Significant numbers of the young people who spearheaded the protests in Tahrir Square had previously been active in supporting the strikers. And there is good reason to believe that a new wave of strikes by textile workers, government employees and others, supporting the political demands of the demonstrators in Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, Sinai and elsewhere, was the decisive factor in driving Mubarak from office. As yet, the Egyptian labor movement remains poorly organized, without a clear political profile. But, as even the *Wall Street Journal* acknowledged, it is Egypt's "sleeping giant."

There can be no doubt that the revolution in Egypt has come as an unwelcome shock to

Washington and Tel Aviv, whatever President Obama might say. The United States and Israel tried to keep Mubarak in power for as long as they could. Although Obama now shamelessly cheers the dictator's departure and heaps commendations on the Egyptian people, his administration's treacherous role in this crisis should never be forgotten. For days, the President, the Vice President and the Secretary of State refused even to label Mubarak a dictator and warned against his too hasty exit. All of this once again gives the lie to Washington's pro-democracy rhetoric. Ever since the United States became deeply involved in the Middle East after World War II, it has operated on the assumption that Arabs — and Iranians — must be kept under control by dictators and autocratic monarchs.

Washington must now be hoping for the success of its fall-back option: an explicitly military-dominated regime. While he may now have been sidelined, Omar Suleiman was the administration's first choice to succeed Mubarak. The longtime head of the security apparatus and thus Egypt's torturer-in-chief, Suleiman is the CIA and the Pentagon's man in Cairo. According to testimony from prisoners who were delivered by the United States to Egyptian torture chambers, Suleiman even participated personally in interrogations.

As for Israel, Netanyahu has made no secret that his government fears and opposes democracy in Egypt. In its war on the Palestinian people, Tel Aviv had a reliable ally in Mubarak. If popular sovereignty really does get established in Egypt, Israeli chauvinists will have good reason to worry. A government in Cairo that responds to the wishes of the Egyptian people is not likely to be willing to help Israel throttle Gaza or to continue legitimizing the phony "peace process." The Mubarak regime, it must be remembered, was hated not only for its corruption and cruelty towards Egyptians, but also for its cynical partnership with Israel and the U.S. The revolution in Egypt makes it crushingly obvious, once again, that Israel's real security depends on recognizing the rights of Palestinians and making common cause with democratic forces throughout the Middle East.

Israeli leaders, and their neo-conservative U.S. supporters, warn that democracy in Egypt will enable the Muslim Brotherhood to transform the country into "another Iran." Obviously, fair elections and freedom for all political parties will allow the Brotherhood to compete for power, and while it is more "moderate" than in the past, there is no proof that it has given up the goal of building an Islamic state under Sharia law, which would be disastrous for workers, women, gays, non-Muslims, and Muslims who don't want the state invading their personal lives. But up until now, the Brotherhood's strength has been a byproduct, in large part, of the decades-long repression of secular leftists, labor unions, and women's movements, which might have posed alternatives. For nearly 60 years, secularism in Egypt has been tainted by its association with a repressive state. Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood was complicitous in perpetuating the Mubarak regime right up to the outbreak of the revolution, which caught it completely off guard and to which it extended only belated support. Mubarak was driven from power, as was Ben Ali in Tunisia, by a movement that had nothing to do with the politics of religious authoritarianism. Once democracy is instituted, secular politics, and, we hope, a secular left, will finally be able to revive and contend for the support of the Egyptian people. In fact, a democratic system is virtually indispensable if Islamism is to be challenged politically. And this is equally true for other "secularist" dictatorships in the Middle East, where Islamist forces currently constitute the main opposition.

The Egyptian people may very well put an end to a military-sponsored dictatorship (albeit with a civilian facade) that has been in power since 1952. It appears for the moment, however, that there are still widespread illusions about the Army's "neutrality" — illusions that have been fostered by the Muslim Brotherhood as well as other political tendencies. Far from being a friend of democracy, the Egyptian military has been the central pillar — indeed the creator — of the police state, a vast apparatus that is believed to employ two million Egyptians, including informers. It controls a lucrative economic empire of farms and factories. But the Army is not a monolith; its soldiers and

junior officers do not have a stake in the system of corruption and repression, and they can be won over to the side of the democratic movement. This is essential if the senior officers are to be prevented from hijacking the revolution. It is the Army command — doubtless in close consultation with the United States — and not the Muslim Brotherhood that constitutes the immediate threat to Egypt's democratic future.

On February 13, *The New York Times* reported: "The Egyptian military consolidated its control Sunday over what it has called a democratic transition from three decades of President Hosni Mubarak's authoritarian rule." We hope that this is premature. In the days and weeks ahead, Egyptians will need to struggle to make sure that their country is controlled by its people and not the armed forces or the security services. This means first and foremost revoking the 30-year "state of emergency" law, which at this writing, the Egyptian military has refused to do. The country's thousands of political prisoners must be released; All use of torture must be immediately outlawed. Mubarak cannot be allowed to escape with his billions; he and other top officials must pay for their crimes. The military has suspended the constitution, but Egyptians need to see to it that it is replaced by a new, democratic constitution that drastically reduces presidential power and guarantees human rights, including the rights of labor, women, and homosexuals. Democratic conditions are needed immediately and genuinely free elections as soon as possible, not after six months of military rule. Finally, if there is any hope for an end to the horrific poverty and exploitation of the Egyptian people, a new government will have to repudiate not only the corruption and cronyism of the Mubarak regime, but also the neoliberalism promoted by the IMF and the United States, which has done so much to bring about such gross inequality and popular immiseration.

The Campaign for Peace and Democracy is fighting for a new, democratic U.S. foreign policy, one that will enable this country to stand in honest solidarity with the popular aspirations of people around the world — rather than being, as it is today, one of the most powerful obstacles to those aspirations. In the months ahead we will make every effort to see that our own government doesn't succeed in working behind the scenes to derail the Egyptian revolution by putting its puppets in power. On February 11, David Sanger reported in *The New York Times* that "the White House and the State Department were already discussing setting aside new funds to bolster the rise of secular political parties." The sordid record of U.S. support for military dictatorship in Egypt for three decades, virtually up until the very end, stands as a compelling reminder that if they hope to build a truly democratic and just society the Egyptian people will need to reject U.S. government intervention in their affairs.

Egypt's young people have led a struggle with the potential to transform their country, the Middle East, and indeed, the world. Egypt's workers have shown the tremendous social power labor can bring to the struggle for democracy. They are an inspiration to us all.

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