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**Riassunto di**  
**ROAD (WITH NO DIRECTION)**  
**TO TAHRIR SQUARE**

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# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
1.Nasser and Sadat Years - Looking for the Best Offer (1952-81) .....	7
1.1 The Advent of the Republic .....	7
1.2 The Economic Policy: Looking for the Best Offer .....	10
1.3 Foreign Policy: Between Two Worlds .....	14
1.4 Domestic Situation .....	21
2.Early Mubarak Years - Waltzing With Democracy (1981-2004) .....	27
2.1 The Era of Short-Sighted Economy .....	28
2.2 Bargaining with Democracy .....	34
2.3 The <i>Inter Regnum</i> (2000-04) .....	44
3.Late Mubarak Years - Keeping the Elite at Power (2005-11) .....	47
3.1 Economic Fall .....	48
3.2 Political Management .....	55
3.3 Tahrir Square: Chronicle of An Unpredictable Success .....	69

4.Exacerbating Factors - Torture, Corruption and Unfinished Projects .....	74
4.1 Torture: a Matter of Tradition .....	75
4.2 Endemic Corruption .....	80
4.3 Toshka: Sixty Years of Egyptian History in a Project .....	83
5.Road to Tahrir Square - A Thrilling Society .....	88
5.1 Egyptian Society .....	88
5.2 Egyptian Media .....	99
6.Conclusions - Popular Will Through Military Lead .....	108
6.1 A Contended Nation .....	109
6.3 July 3: Not a <i>Coup d'état</i> .....	116
Bibliography .....	119

# RESUME

The present work will seek to examine the Egyptian history with the twofold aim to find the political, economic and social reasons that brought to the January 25 revolts and provide with an interpretation for the present situation in the country. To achieve such aim, the work will be divided into three *nuclei*: in the first (chapters 1-3), the history of Egypt will be analysed in order to find the political and economic reasons that brought people to Tahrir Square in January-February 2011. In the second *nucleus* (chapters 4-5) will be examined the social and psychological reasons leading people to revolt. Finally (chapter 6), the years 2011-13 will be presented in terms of contentious between the two groups that gave strength to the 2011 revolts and the action by the military entourage to stabilise the situation in the country from behind the scenes.

## Chapter 1

### **Presidents Gamal Abd el-Nasser and Anwar al-Sadat (1952-70)**

Chapter 1 analyses the years of Presidents Gamal Abd el-Nasser and Anwar al-Sadat. In particular, the chapter seeks to describe the choices made by the two Presidents in the economic and foreign policies and how the changes they made had important reverberations on the domestic situation.

During the first years of Gamal el-Nasser presidency Egypt slowly moved towards the Soviet Bloc in order to attract funds and diplomatic protection from Moscow. At the core of such orientation in foreign and economic policy laid the need to obtain funds to build the High Dam in Aswan and the need to obtain protection in order to stand the military confrontation against Israel. The first pace towards the Eastern Bloc was taken with the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company after Egypt lost the United States funds because of a political controversy. After such moment Egypt increasingly relied on the USSR support and in 1960 nationalised the first domestic firms. The entrenchment between the USSR and Egypt continued throughout the 1960s with the implantation of an actual socialist system which would have proved to be too expensive especially after Egypt lost in the 1967 military confrontation with Israel.

Anwar al-Sadat succeeded President Nasser in 1970 and inherited an economic situation that the author Khalid Ikram described as follows 'In 1971, in sum, the economic situation [...] was bleak'. President Sadat's years, in fact, were marked by the attempt to rebuild the Egyptian finances and for doing so he had no other choice than re-starting relations with the US. After the Egyptian victory in the 1973 confrontation against Israel President Sadat decided to take a liberal economic strategy that came into being with the name of *infitah* (Open Door Policy). The new policy tried to find a balance between the nationalised system of the Nasserite era and the new idea of liberalization. The effects, though, were mixed: the country performed well on the macro-economic side, but it generated huge problems in terms of social cohesion. The new economic policies 'written' by the IMF set an end to the era of controlled prices and equality of opportunities for everyone which culminated in the so-called bread riots in January 1977. The riots constituted the first moment of actual revolution within the country as they had been triggered by the surge in price and the effects of mismanaged transition of the economic system.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Early President Mubarak Years (1981-2004)**

The sudden assassination of President Sadat on 6 October 1981 occurred in a situation of high tension in the country. The *infitah*, which was the current economic policy, had reduced dramatically the welfare of the Egyptian middle class and had also made the life conditions even more difficult for the poorest. In addition to this, the peace treaty with Israel signed in Camp David in 1979 inflamed the conscience of the militant Islamists; indeed, the wave of repression before the assassination of the President represented the straw that broke the camel's back.

President Mubarak found Egypt in a dramatic situation and he could do nothing but trying to stabilise the country through apparent openings to democracy and by slowing down the implantation of the capitalist system. In such a way Hosni Mubarak could satisfy both the local population and the United States that had become the prominent foreign partner of Egypt. The problem of the balance found by the President Mubarak (called *friendly dictatorship*) laid on the fact that it could last only with a positive economic trend.

The reduction in the oil price after 1986 and the First Gulf War put the Egyptian economy into pressure. Consequently to these events, the country started a period of major confrontation between the fundamentalist opposition and the Government. In a sort of 'chain effect' the worsening economic conditions brought to a social unrest which brought was opposed with an increasing repression by the regime. Such a situation self-alimented throughout all the 1990s when, after a new economic policy called ERSAP, the economic situation stabilised and the Government won against the fundamentalist opposition.

The years 2000-2004 were years of relative stability. The economic indicators were all positive with inflation reducing by more than 90 percent after it had reached its apex in 1995 (15.7 percent) and the per capita income doubling in the same

period. Nevertheless, the country still suffered from large problems derived from overpopulation and the regime seeing its support reduced in the first elections largely controlled by judges in the year 2000.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Late Mubarak Years (2005-11)**

The years 2005-11 cast several lights on the reasons why millions of people decided at the beginning of 2011 to manifest against the regime's establishment after the revolutionary Tunisia had got rid of their ruler. Such a period, in fact, was eventful and was marked by problems at the political and economic level generating an almost uninterrupted situation of popular unrest.

At a political level, in fact, these years saw the surging tension between the opposition and President Mubarak who was making his efforts to amend the Constitution in order to pave the way for his son Gamal. In opposition to such a will by the President, a political movement called *Kefaya* (Enough) gathering all the oppositions from the secularist to the religious was born. The movement had the sole aim to contrast the attempt by the dictator to create a *de facto* family inheritance of the presidential title. The opposition movement, even if eventually unsuccessful, opened a large fracture within the country since it gave birth to a period of uninterrupted opposition to the Government.

After 2008, the fracture widened consequently to the economic shapes deteriorated after the Global Financial Crisis which made a large part of the population become poorer and poorer. The sole year 2008 saw over 1,000 square demonstrations with the regime responding to the street dissent with an increased level of authoritarianism. The large-scale repression put in place by the regime, nevertheless, was not inexpensive due to the fact that the new media were able to

globalize the shame of several abuses committed by the police forces. Such 'globalization' had reverberation also at the economic level due to the fact that the United States' House of Representatives every year discussed the reduction of the aid to Egypt in order to take countermeasures against the regime's increased authoritarianism.

The first decade of the new millennium concluded with Egypt in a state of high tension after the Government had put in place a series of fraudulent measures aimed to take the control of the Egyptian Parliament (November-December 2010). The state of tension, alimeted by the successful Tunisian revolution, led thousands of people to manifest against the Government on January 25. That day became a watershed in the Egyptian history since it marked the first moment of an eighteen-day period of uninterrupted revolts which eventually brought to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Torture, Corruption and Unfinished Projects**

The aim of chapter 4 is to provide the reader with the idea of what was concealed beyond the macro-economic data and the major political happenings within the country. History textbooks, in fact, generally pay little or no attention to those social elements that are able to deliver a positive or negative perception of the world. The chapter is basically aimed to describe those reasons that exasperated people leading them to the revolts.

Torture constituted an important reason for social unrest. In spite of a series of international commitments ranging from the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' to the 'Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment', the Egyptian Government made all his efforts to direct the



policies to preserve the use of torture by indirect means. When in the early 1990s the situation in the country became more tense, the regime decided to reform the Penal Code permitting arrests without charges on the ground of 'terrorism' or 'drugs smuggling'. Such a broad formulation was made more effective by the fact that a 'police abuse' could be defined as 'torture' only when a person was convicted for a specific crime. Given the grey area, several NGOs operating in the field of human rights' protection reported several cases of abuses on men, women, adolescents and even children. In such a perspective, the case by Khaled Said in 2010 constituted an actual trigger that pushed people to take to the streets and manifest against the governmental practice.

Corruption represents a second dimension that pushed people to take action against the regime. After the economic mismanagement and the lack of transparency had brought Egypt to a 'race to the bottom' that had made corruption become endemic. At a governmental level, a series of mechanisms aimed to shelter the Ministers while they were in office were created. Ministers members of the Egyptian Parliament were repeatedly found breaching Article 95 of the Constitution which forbade to buy sell or rent governmental properties. The corruption of the 'top level' of the State, however, was backed by the corruption of the middle and lower classes which was not less important than the first one. The more minute corruption, in fact, contributed to enlarge phenomena of social degeneration where everyone exploited his position in order to obtain those marginal units of money in order to survive.

The Toshka Project represents the best summary of the unsustainability of the Egyptian economy. The project was presented in 1997 and all odds were in favour of it; at its completion, scheduled in 2017, the ambitious project would have been composed by a 240 km canal routed westward from Lake Nasser (South of Egypt) that would have 'turned to green' some 15,000 square kilometres of desert and would have constituted the house for 8 million Egyptians. In September 2013, the project has not even reached the first stage due in 2005. To date, only 60 km of the canal were dig and it has turned to green less than 1 percent of what was scheduled and

there had been a disproportion between what was built and what was paid. Interestingly enough in the New Valley Governorate live less than 400,000 people in spite of the million that were initially planned (0.5 percent).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Dynamic Society and New Media**

Contrary to the general perception, the Egyptian society had constantly evolved throughout the decades. The chapter aims to explain why the January 25 revolts transforming into a revolution were not an altogether unpredictable event.

The generation of the adolescents in the early years 2000 was a modern generation that perceived the social relation both between peers and parent-children relations totally different *vis--vis* the generation of their parents. Interestingly enough, in fact, it was found proof of the fact that any single segment of the new generation (according to the indicators male/female and living in the city/countryside) was much more modern and more open to changes than any other generation before. For example, in the first years 2000 it was possible to see an increasing number of women taking part in social movements or with some kind of political commitment. Such fact reflected on the number of public manifestations against the Government that increased exponentially reaching the year 2011.

The changes within the society were made easier by the improved possibility of both obtaining unbiased information (for example through Al-Jazeera) and being more connected with people (through the internet). The *Kefaya* movement, the *April 6 Youth Movement* (2008) and the Facebook page *We Are All Khaled Said* were huge movements that marked the fact that the Egyptians had started not only to be more aware of what was happening in the country, but also to take action against those events that they judged as negative. The new media, in fact, played a fundamental

role during the revolts in January-February 2011 since they enabled people both to better organize and to receive external support by showing the world what was taking place in Egypt.

## **Conclusions**

### **Popular Will Through Military Lead**

The January 25 revolt started an 18-day period of uninterrupted manifestations which ended with the resignation of President Mubarak on 11 February 2011. Despite the most aesthetic appearance, though, the democratic period opening consequently to the end of the Mubarak regime was not the product of the revolts in Tahrir Square. In fact, it represented the attempt by the military entourage to stabilise the country from behind the scenes through an apparent opening to democracy.

The first democratic step was taken on 19 March 2011 when fourteen million Egyptian approved the amendments to the Constitution. In the points that were risen during the revolts. The presidential terms for each individual were limited to two, the use of force on the ground of 'terrorism' was dismissed and it was agreed to draft a new Constitution after the election of a new Parliament. Nevertheless, the Referendum passed without the joint approval by the two groups that had given strength to the revolution (the secular and religious groups) creating a gap that would have widened in the following electoral turns.

The new National Assembly was elected in three turns between November 2011 and January 2012 and the electoral outcome delivered the image of a deep division between the two groups. The Muslim Brothers and the Salafi wing, in fact, secured two-thirds of the votes and elected the Speaker of the Assembly without any external support. Even if the two groups did not form an actual alliance, in late January 2012 it became clear the fact that the religious wing, led by the Muslim

Brothers, was trying to implant its own vision for the political development of the country.

In May-June 2012 the new President of the Republic was elected and on this occasion the fracture between the secular and religious groups became even larger. Mohamed Morsi (proceeding from the Muslim Brothers) was elected by a narrow majority but, interestingly enough, he won against a man of the regime, former Prime Minister of Egypt Ahmed Shafik (PM during the 2011 revolts). The Security Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), understanding the fact that the country may have passed through new moments of tension because of an increasing animosity between the two groups decided to take a precautionary measure. Before Mohamed Morsi was elected President, the SCAF decided to change the Constitution (already subjected to the 19 March 2011 referendum) in order exclude the control of the army from the powers of the President of the Republic.

The fears by the military were confirmed a few months later when President Morsi decided to force the approval of the new Constitution fearing that a decision by the Judiciary may have dissolved the Constitutional Assembly. Such fact was perceived as an authoritarian decision and it gave birth to a period of continuous manifestations against the Government. On 30 June 2013, the first anniversary of the Morsi presidency, a crowd of fourteen million people manifested against the 'new Pharaoh'. The decision by President Morsi not to accept the terms of the ultimatum given by the SCAF, thus not endorsing the popular requests, brought the military to remove the President from office.

The removal of President Morsi from office, however, should not be intended as a *coup d'état* as several commentators hurried to define it. In fact, all the decisions made at the political level, including the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, were made by the SCAF. In such a perspective, the 19 March 2011 Referendum, the election of the National Assembly and the President of the Republic and the Constitutional Referendum on December 2012 took place under the 'umbrella' and with the consent of the SCAF. The final decision by the military to

arrest President Morsi on 3 July 2013 was not a *coup d'état* but it was rather the prosecution of the military's policy to enhance stability by other means after the religious wing at power had jeopardised the fragile equilibrium in the country.

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