

Mubarak is done; his words evoke more fury and anger. **Does the US truly see through that public rage in** **Egypt?**

Genet Mersha, 29 January 2011

At least, Mubarak proved wrong many who on Friday thought that he had joined his wife and son in London. It was a reasonable assumption though, given that the president was not seen in public or heard until half past midnight Saturday morning. Since last Tuesday, Cairo has been engulfed in protests and in flames. Saturday morning, the demonstrators have shown both restraint and increased defiance. The test of Egyptian and US resolve is how the Egyptian army would respond Saturday evening, when curfew time begins at five o'clock—two hours earlier.



As a shrewd politician, Mr. Mubarak realizes his end is here. The army he ordered Friday afternoon complied with his order to be out in the street, but has done nothing to enforce the curfew Friday night. In spite the curfew, therefore, protestors were in the streets Friday night, after the president's speech furiously demanding his resignation. He also has seen since Thursday, the United States keenness to emphasize what he should do more to respond to the protestors, a signal that he has outlived his usefulness. Interestingly, the protestors are also insistent that Egyptians must be allowed to solve their problems, without interference by the United States.

Under the circumstances, what Mr. Mubarak is fiddling with may not any longer be about his stay in power, or responding to the popular clamour. As a typical Egyptian, who is convinced about their uniqueness in the Arab world, he too may be seeking an honorable way out, unlike Tunisia's Zein al-Abidine Ben Ali. As the protests gathered momentum in Tunisia, Ben Ali began to panic and confessed on television about his wrongs and readiness to mend his ways to ensure democracy and respect for human rights. How could he give what he did not have in his 23 years in power? His choice is now to face the Interpol, sought for stealing Tunisia's wealth.

Even Ben Ali's brother, the tycoon Belhassen Trabelsi, is in hiding now in Canada, after that country cancelled his residence permit, having found out that he had arrived on a private plane last week loaded with cash. Although almost in the same league with Ben Ali, in terms of his repression of Egyptian society and corruption in power, Mubarak did not want his personal history to be linked to Ben Ali's.

One significant blunder by Mubarak Saturday morning was his claim in his statement, "I assure you that I'm working for the people and giving freedom... as long as you're respecting the law." That has lumped him with Ben Ali. A man who has kept three decades of state of emergency in force in Egypt, all of a sudden has turned into a friend of rule of law, a man of the constitution, democratic rights and freedom...

Finally, his promise was, "There will be new steps toward democracy and freedoms and new steps to face unemployment and increase the standard of living and services, and there will be new steps to help the poor and those with limited income." Where has he been in the last thirty years, or even two years ago, when Obama came to Egypt as a new president to speak to the Arab world from Cairo and urged him to do exactly that? Obama's response was to the point:

When President Mubarak addressed the Egyptian people tonight, he pledged a better democracy and greater economic opportunity. I just spoke to him after his speech, and I told him he has a responsibility to give meaning to those words; to take concrete steps and actions that deliver on that promise... Violence will not address the grievances of the Egyptian people, and suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away... The people of Egypt have rights that are universal. That includes the right to peaceful assembly and association, the right to free speech and the ability to determine their own destiny. These are human rights and the United States will stand up for them everywhere... I also call upon the Egyptian government to reverse the actions

that they've taken to interfere with access to the Internet, to cellphone service and to social networks that do so much to connect people in the 21st century.

Surely, mobile phone service and Internet are back, even as the new cabinet is being formed Saturday. Nonetheless, the thinking of the military and its response to change in Egypt is yet to be seen. The army is a respected institution having distanced itself from politics under Hosni Mubarak. That was not because he believed in professional army. For that matter, he has no vice-president to succeed him. All his ministers are technocrats, without political party base. He has no patience to aspirants to his power.

I am very much struck by the actions and response of the United States. I have lived long enough to say that this is the first time I have seen the United States listening seriously to the street and giving counsel to its important ally that he would do better if he responded to the people's demands. President Barack Obama emphasized in his response to Mubarak's speech: "What's needed right now are concrete steps that advance the rights of the Egyptian people." That is complete departure from hitherto United States permanent partisanship with murderous dictators, such as Pinochet in Chile, Sesse Seko in Zaire, Suharto in Indonesia and the apartheid leaders in South Africa, Savimbi in Angola (George Bush I), ... and now Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia.

Therefore, it is time to give credit to the Obama administration for the posture it has assumed on the evolving situation in Egypt. Whatever the outcome, the United States has saved face, for now. Besides what the Secretary of State Clinton and President Obama said on Thursday and Friday, White House Spokesperson person Robert Gibbs Friday afternoon gave more than he could under these abnormal circumstances, even before Mubarak spoke at that ungodly hour, as he faced the hungry press. Clearly, the United States has tightened all loose ends, as it communicated with Mubarak and his officials.

Robert Gibbs Friday said, "It has been communicated[US demands to Mubarak]not just from this podium, not just in the remarks of the Secretary of State, but at levels within the Pentagon to the Egyptian military from the Egyptian military, from the State Department, from the words and conversations that have been had by Ambassador Scobey -- all levels -- and also the words, most importantly, of the President yesterday."

With every passing hour, the United States is seen distancing itself from Mubarak. As a country that supplies Cairo with \$1.3 billion in military aid and \$250 million in economic aid yearly, already on Friday it implicitly indicated that, nearly like the Egyptian people without being vociferous, it would have little of Mubarak's regime. It has also been made clear to the security forces and the army, in the words of Mr. Gibbs "I think that if -- [sentence not completed] I think we are watching very closely the actions of the government, of the police, of all the security forces, and all of those in the military. That their actions may affect our assistance would be the subject of that review." Unheard of before!

Journalists pressed and quizzed Robert Gibbs during the briefing for more information; later rightly analysts called the administration's position "walking a tight line", euphemism in diplomacy, when a diplomat or a country equivocates not to take clear position. At this stage, there is no doubt that the US could have done still much better, were not for its limited options. Any further obtrusion could have endangered its strategic interests in the greater Middle East, especially the Palestinian question and Egypt-Israeli relations and serving as cordon against Iranian intentions in the Persian Gulf and with respect to nuclear weapons.

Unfortunately, not any differently from the Bush administration, the Obama administration has also been sucked into the anti-terrorism alliance, thereby giving blank checks to worst human rights violators such as Mubarak, Meles, Ali Salah... In recent years, fighting terrorism has become the bonanza Meles and Mubarak are exploiting, because of which they have enabled to entrench themselves in power this long, while becoming intolerably dictatorial and stealing election results in broad daylight. In the case of Egypt, this has also emboldened Mubarak to try to engage in attempts to create a dynasty wishing to install his son as his successor—a man who is among the many causes boiling the blood of Egyptians, especially the middle class.

The door has now been opened for the demands of the Egyptian people. Nevertheless, dazed by power's aphrodisiac, he might in his folly hope to stay in power for a while. The truth is that, as far as Egyptian people are concerned, he is finished. The US no longer sees in him a leader as useful for their interests of controlling Iran, the

Palestinians, and as a go between those Arab countries to whom the US often sends signals indirectly.

Finally, the question is whether this welcome and changed approach by the Obama administration i.e., to show the door to a dictator is based in American fundamental principles, as the president claims. If that is the case, principles are applicable to all peoples thirsting for freedom and human dignity. Principles cannot discriminate between select allies and others. If that is the case, there is no reason for the United States to tolerate a duplicitous Stalinist regime in Ethiopia, whom Washington and London, along with China cuddle, even as he continues to kill aspirations of the Ethiopian people for freedom and dignified life. How could torture be tolerated?

For a clear demonstration of Stalinism in Ethiopia, just go through this comparative table of what Ethiopia is today, compared to Egypt and what would have happened, if there is mass protest today, which is totally shut of by law.

Egypt	Ethiopia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since Tuesday, about 35 people have been killed, hundreds injured, over 2,000 imprisoned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a few hours, nearly 200 were mowed down in Addis Ababa only and about 40,000 were imprisoned in 2005; Meles would have massacred tens of thousands today, possibly in one day
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio and television continued to operate normally, focusing on the demonstrations, although tweets, Internet mobile services were pulled off. Restored on Saturday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No demonstrations were shown on TV; after the massacre of the students, Meles said they were robbers and hooligans; the media began to echo that ad infinitum; sms blocked for nearly three years after that
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airlines suspended flights, airport still open 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No flights in and out; airport was shut down
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is relatively better leeway for the press to operate in Egypt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 2005 media has been reduced to government mouthpiece, cadres operate as journalists, while members of independent press are imprisoned, flee the country and their establishments closed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security forces imprison and torture; no independent judiciary; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security forces imprison and torture. More Stalinist than Stalin's time: no rule of law; no independent judiciary,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is not normally ideologically indoctrinated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational system tainted with false history and ideology for purposes of maintain Meles's power
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army is kept outside politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army and security are political instruments of Meles, recruited and promoted on the basis of belonging to his ethnic group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worst violator of human rights; at least Egyptians are not imprisoned for criticizing the regime openly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worst violator of human rights; even suspected opposition to the TPLF entails being sent to the 'gulag' in Kaliti and Maekelawi for tortures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person rule, fights the opposition, although civil society organizations operate in Egypt with some limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person rule, encircled by ethnic coteries, no room for political participation or for independent civil society organizations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread corruption in the upper echelons mostly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corrupt leadership, linked to the prime minister himself and his family and down to party cadres and the ethnically constituted army
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 2004, Egypt has found the success to its economic development because of professionals handling policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethiopia's economy is Meles's guinea pig into his fluid thinking picking up one thing and dropping the other every time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public frustration grew over time, but Egyptian society remains still united 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger and frustration has reached boiling point; fear has kept the lid on it, in a country that is polarized through and through