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## High noon in Egypt?

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The parallels between President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and the deposed shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi of Iran, are attention-getting. In 1979, prior to the notorious Islamic Revolution, which was instigated and controlled by radical Muslim cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the shah wielded personal and authoritarian power in a manner comparable to the dictators of the time: Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, and earlier, Fulgencio Batista in Cuba.

These rulers brandished their power with little restraint, unencumbered by the rule of law and basically insensitive to the needs of their populace. Unfortunately, Hosni Mubarak alarmingly resembles these former dictators in social, political, economic and security issues. He is inadvertently pushing his country towards an Islamic revolution.

As an earlier example, the shah of Iran slowly strangled his country by reigning with a heavy-hand through his unfettered security force. He narrowed the sociopolitical base of his government and distorted the economy by monopolistic actions. This modus operandi reflects Mr. Mubarak's current regime, whose survival depends on his ability to reverse these trends.

Accordingly, Mr. Mubarak uses his "Central Security Force," that now consists of more than half of his entire military, to impose a measure of censorship on the mass media and ban most forms of political organization, activities and literary expression.

Like the shah, he has established control over physical action, selectively executing opposition, imprisoning and exiling thousands of people who oppose his policies. Recently, the leading English language newspaper Al-Ahram Weekly reported an upsurge in deaths due to police brutality. Another Arab news source reported the barring of human-rights groups from attending secret military trials.

Economically, Mr. Mubarak monopolistically privatizes the highly regulated Egyptian economy, fostering creation of an exclusive industrial bourgeoisie. He invites only pro-Mubarak businesses to work within his development schemes. Like the shah, he has alienated large sections of the public and private sectors, thus suppressing any real economic growth.

Politically, Mr. Mubarak cracks down on civil participation, essentially repressing political opposition; while his lack of government transparency practically guarantees rife corruption throughout the 4 million strong bureaucracy.

Equally important, is the lack of government response to crises. Al-Ahram Weekly reported 20 train crashes between 1995 and August 2006. In each case, the government formed an ineffectual and disorganized crisis-management council that failed to correct

the problem. As the government failed to meet the needs of its people, the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan) filled a void by establishing social services, such as health clinics and youth programs, to effectively respond to various situations. The first and best-known example of this was their mobilization after the 1992 earthquake struck Southern Cairo. The Muslim Brotherhood provided disaster relief then, and continues to do so, thereby enhancing its traction.

Additionally, the Muslim Brotherhood has nonviolently taken control of 15 percent of major professional associations that form the greater part of Egypt's middle class. In the most recent parliamentary election in 2005, the Muslim Brotherhood presented the largest threat to Mr. Mubarak's National Democratic Party, securing an unprecedented 34 out of 454 seats. They demonstrated their ability to draw support despite government opposition.

Mr. Mubarak unwittingly nurtured the regrowth of the essentially Fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood by alienating segments of the Egyptian populace and eliminating soft-line opposition (such as the secular Wafd and al-Ghad parties).

He must seek more innovative methods to remain in power. For example, Chile managed to open the economy and encourage free enterprise under Augusto Pinochet, even though his government was considered authoritarian.

Mr. Mubarak must tap into the tremendous energy of the Egyptian people by increasing the pace of capitalization and democratization, thereby improving their standard of living. If he succeeds, Mr. Mubarak could eventually create a legacy for himself as an Arab leader who effectively modernized and democratized this "keystone" nation.

In doing so, he would secure major assets such as the Suez Canal, Egypt's oil production and tourism, for not only his country but for the global economy, while providing a positive example for the entire Muslim world. Furthermore, U.S. ability to deal with Egypt will be enhanced, and our aid to that country will become completely justified.

But if Mr. Mubarak fails, his regime will fall to the same type of radical elements that claimed the shah's government in 1979, creating compounded turmoil for Egypt and the world.

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