

Egypt is still Mubarakstan

Written by Amira Nowaira

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Hosni Mubarak was only the visible tip of an iceberg of corruption – the state he created in his image remains

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/29/egypt-hosni-mubarak-corruption>

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More than two months after the start of the [popular uprising](#) that overthrew President Hosni Mubarak, Egyptians are increasingly fearful that although he is gone, his regime is still alive and kicking.

Egyptians now realise that Mubarakstan, the virtual edifice created by Mubarak and his coterie to ensure the continued dominance of a closed circle of politicians and businessmen, hasn't collapsed along with the fall of its head and protector.

It is also distressingly evident that Mubarak was nothing more than the visible tip of an iceberg of corruption, for Mubarakstan is in fact a full-fledged state – a colonial power in every sense of the word, a state with its own colonial discourse, its propaganda machine and its brutal militia. It even has its own capital in the city of [Sharm el-Sheikh](#), where the ruling elite eat their imported dinners and lounge on sumptuous sandy beaches.

In Sharm el-Sheikh a parallel universe has been created, a lavish and elaborate underwater tank where the noises of the people can't filter through. That's why it has become the emblem of the rift between the decision-makers, whose decisions were taken only in support of their own interests, and the population they governed, whose angry shouts remained totally muted.

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Mubarakstan has created its little Sharm el-Sheikhs in many other locations, small enclaves of gated communities in the most spectacular places in the country, leaving the rest of the "natives", 40% of whom live way below any recognisable poverty line, to languish in a huge country-wide ghetto.

The state of Mubarakstan even boasts its own bank. The Arab International Bank, which stands on Egyptian soil, is nonetheless an offshore business enterprise that is completely outside the Egyptian government's jurisdiction.

This was where Egypt's billionaires deposited their loot without the possibility of ever being found out. How and when was such a bank established? Why is it still operating? These are questions that nobody is answering at the moment.

The [military council](#) that took power following the overthrow of Mubarak pledged an end to corruption. Nothing on the ground, however, suggests that the desired change is happening. For one thing, Mubarak and his family seem no closer to prosecution today than they have ever been.

It is true that [a few figures](#) have been offered as sacrificial lambs, including the interior minister who had given the orders to fire at demonstrators. But Mubarak's close associates, who had been implicated in flagrant abuses of the political system and had amassed huge fortunes, are still at large.

More serious still, state television and newspapers are still headed by the same pro-Mubarak propaganda team who falsified facts during the protests. Egyptians can't forget how state TV falsely accused protesters of being foreign spies who had been paid to destabilise the country.

Why are these officials still occupying their positions? No credible answer has been given. What is particularly worrying is that the military council and the new government of Essam Sharaf, who was himself given an overwhelming vote of confidence in Tahrir, seem to be adopting the same strategy of selective deafness that the Mubarak regime had used.

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Another bewildering phenomenon is the security situation. Almost daily we hear of prisons being forcibly opened, of fires breaking out in sensitive establishments, including the interior ministry and the Central Bank. These are often glossed over with no information provided.

Equally ominous is the unleashing of Islamists of various affiliations on the Egyptian scene. A few days before the referendum on constitutional amendments (which was turned intentionally, it seems, into a holy war) some radical Islamists were released from prison, including [Aboud al-Zomor](#) who had been implicated in the murder of Sadat.

Not only was he set free at this particular juncture, but he was also given a hero's welcome on TV and in the papers. Every time I changed the TV channel, he was there spewing out some criminal nonsense, such as the legitimacy of murdering people if religious scholars permitted it.

Was the publicity given to Zomor and other Islamic radicals an innocent coincidence? This is hardly likely. The message to the Egyptian population and to the world was clear. It was the message that Mubarak was trying to give throughout his 30 years in office. If Egyptians didn't accept Mubarak's terms of stability, the beasts would be let out of their cages.

The ruling military council has repeatedly reassured the Egyptian people that all their legitimate demands will be fulfilled. I sincerely hope so – not only for the sake of the military's credibility, which hangs in the balance, but also for the sake of the country.

But should the military or the government believe that they can still ignore public opinion and continue to provide no adequate answers to all these queries, they will be making a historic mistake.

I don't think that the tide of change can turn back no matter how hard Mubarak and his fallen regime may resist. A few years ago, the government imposed a mandatory course on human rights throughout Egyptian universities, in an attempt to whitewash the regime's abhorrent record on human rights. The course was taught as lifeless texts that students were required to learn off by heart and reproduce verbatim in the examination paper at the end of the year. Today, as I walk on the street and hear people of all ages and backgrounds discussing police brutality, incarceration without charge and the constitution, I realise that the past two months

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have certainly been a hugely successful learning experience for all Egyptians. It has made them vastly more aware of their rights as citizens than any textbook and has led them to understand better than ever before the significance of collective resistance.

The fallen Mubarak regime may fight as hard as it can to retain its hold on power, and it may score some limited victories. But in the end nothing can take away Egyptians' sense of empowerment that resulted from their collective action.

- This article was amended at 15.35 BST on 29 March to correct the name of the Arab International Bank.