



Crisis in Egypt: Implications for India

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Summary

In the past India has followed a policy of non- intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. However, it cannot shy away from its commitment and support to a peaceful mass movement for political reform. What we are witnessing in West Asia and North Africa at present is a fundamental shift in the very foundations of the regional political order. The mass protests in Egypt and earlier in Tunisia signal the disgruntlement and dissatisfaction of people with authoritarian regimes that have ruled over them for decades; what the people want is a democratic system. In this environment, as a democratic nation, India needs to back the peaceful transition acceptable to the people of Egypt.

Egypt is at a crossroads. Given the country's pivotal position in the Middle East, mass protests against President Hosni Mubarak's government are shaking the very foundations of the political order in the region. Parallels are being drawn between Cairo 2011 and Tehran 1978/9, as well as Berlin, Warsaw and other East European cities in 1990/91. However, the impact of current developments in Egypt goes far beyond its borders. There have been mass protests in Syria, Sudan, Jordan as well as in Yemen, while leaders in Algeria, Jordan, Libya, Kuwait, Morocco, Syria and Yemen have sought to stave off a real or perceived contagion by announcing concessions on jobs, housing and prices. What has caused this crisis and what is the impact of these developments on the region, the world at large, and India in particular?¹

The Unfolding Crisis

After several years of stability, President Hosni Mubarak's government is in crisis. On January 25, 2011, the people's protests started in Egypt inspired by Tunisia's "Jasmine Uprising"; many protesters carried Tunisian flags as a symbol of their power against the Mubarak government.² The demonstrations are the largest that Egypt has seen since the 1977 Bread Riots. The demonstrators have concentrated on legal and political issues including police brutality, emergency law, lack of free and fair elections and corruption, as well as economic issues including high inflation rate and low minimum wages. Demands from protest organizers also include a new government that represents the interests of the Egyptian people.

It appears that President Mubarak's policies and the downturn in the economy have contributed to this situation. Following the assassination of President Sadat, Egypt appeared to be on the verge of a large scale Islamic insurrection. To prevent it President Mubarak resorted to large scale repressive measures. The West, particularly the United States, and the conservative Arab states like Saudi Arabia, chipped in with substantial financial aid to sustain the economy and create a sense of financial well being in the country. However, while these measures brought in a semblance of security and prosperity, the fundamentals of the economy remained unchanged. Islamic radicals had no difficulty in penetrating the ranks of Egypt's poor. The Mubarak regime responded to the situation with repression. This in turn created a new class of critics – intellectuals and modernists. When they became stronger, the regime became very intolerant and cracked down hard on them. The West which had applauded the Mubarak regime's draconian measures to suppress the Islamists, also chose to look the other way over this popular angst and frustration.

¹ This study incorporates the inputs from a brainstorming session held at IDSA on February 1, 2011.

² Dan Murphy, "Inspired by Tunisia, Egypt's protests appear unprecedented," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 25, 2011, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Backchannels/2011/0125/Inspired-by-Tunisia-Egypt-s-protests-appear-unprecedented>

Moreover, the recent international financial crisis worsened the situation. The falling GDP growth rate (4.5 per cent in 2009)³ has had an adverse impact on the export oriented sectors including manufacturing and tourism. Similarly, there has been a reduction in oil revenues and remittances from millions of expatriate workers in oil-rich Arab states. Rising unemployment on one hand and the massive divide between the rich and the poor on the other are other reasons for the popular angst. Mubarak had encouraged privatization, which led to a financial boom for wealthy Egyptians. Thus, a sort of class war has erupted in the country. It is also believed that Mubarak wanted to appoint his son, Gamal Mubarak, as President of Egypt. However, the defence establishment, which has a huge say in running the country, did not agree to such an eventuality. At the same time police brutality and rising corruption are other factors that have led to the current crisis. The Egyptian Human Rights Organisation reported that 167 people were killed by the police between 1993 and 2007.⁴ Political corruption especially in the Ministry of Interior has grown dramatically, due to the enlarged power granted to it to strengthen the presidency.

However, these are not the first protests against the Mubarak government. In 2003, the Egyptian Movement for Change, popularly known as *Kefaya*, was initiated against the regime to establish democracy and greater civil liberties. But the movement was dismantled after minor reforms, such as a referendum, to approve changes to the constitution that would allow the first ever direct multi candidate election for the presidency which took place on May 25, 2005 and the Presidential election itself, held on September 7, 2005.

Egypt's future is now a subject of keen debate. One thing is certain, Mubarak's time is up. He has already announced his decision to not stand for re-election in September 2011 when his term ends. However, the question is whether he will last until then and what will happen to the political and administrative edifice built by him after his departure. Mubarak's continuance until September looks unlikely particularly as the Army, his last resort, looks uncertain and may be divided. It has shown no inclination to vigorously confront the people and has been openly fraternising with the protesters.

As of now, the protestors are without any leaders; the protests have been primarily organised by Egyptian youth, especially those associated with the April 6 movement.⁵ But there seems to be some kind of an endorsement for Mohammad El Baradei. The Mubarak regime and his predecessors have systematically emasculated all moderate opposition in the last 60 years. The only opposition group that is organised is the Muslim Brotherhood, which won 20 per cent of the vote in recent elections. Of course, the

³ The World Fact Book, Central Intelligence Agency Report, 2010, available on <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2116.html>

⁴ "Egypt police sued for boy's death," *BBC News*, August 13, 2007, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6943704.stm>

⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/02/who-is-behind-egyptian-protests>

Brotherhood is currently taking the back seat and has endorsed El Baradei as the nominal leader of the protest movement. However, there is a danger that if these protests continue and the entire regime collapses, then the Muslim Brotherhood might emerge as the dominant group driving Egyptian politics. The Brotherhood's ideology is well known and it is Islamist in character; al-Zawahiri, the deputy leader of the al Qaeda has his roots in the Brotherhood. The speeches and proposals of Brotherhood members in the Egyptian parliament indicate that they wish to establish an Islamist state ruled by the Sharia and which is at war with Israel and the United States. When Egyptians were asked by the Pew polling agency in late 2010 whether they preferred modernisers or the Islamists, 59 per cent said they prefer the Islamists, and only 27 per cent preferred the modernisers. The Brotherhood's emergence as the dominant actor in Egypt will provide a great boost to Islamists everywhere. For Egypt will then emerge as a 'cause' rather than being simply an important country in the region and of the world. And this is not in the interests of India, the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the world at large.

Having said that, it is still not clear how exactly the situation will unfold. President Mubarak has appointed his intelligence chief as the Vice President, and the commander of the Air Force as the Prime Minister. Both these appointments and the other subsequent changes to the Cabinet have not found favour with the peaceful protestors. On January 30, 2011, the Egyptian military sent a symbolic message to the protestors by dispatching a column of tanks into Tahrir Square, by flying air force fighters low over the city, and by the constant hovering of helicopters. The Egyptian military has been the force behind the throne since 1952 when military officers overthrew the monarchy. All three presidents since then have come from the military – Gamal Nasser, Anwar Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak. But at the same time it is also not clear whether the military itself is united. There are reports that the Commander in Chief of the Egyptian military, Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, may have thrown his lot with the protestors. The fact that all Egyptian men have to serve term in the military means that it is a people's army. Where will its sympathies lie? Which way will it lean? It appears that the military itself is trying to adopt a calibrated approach to the situation and is in fact searching its way forward towards a resolution. While it sent a muscular message a few days earlier, on 31 January it issued a statement which stated that the armed forces "will not resort to use of force against our great people. Your armed forces, who are aware of the legitimacy of your demands and are keen to assume their responsibility in protecting the nation and citizens, affirm that freedom of expression through peaceful means is guaranteed to everybody." At the same time, the statement also urged people not to resort to acts of sabotage that violated security and destroyed property, warning that it would not allow outlaws to loot, attack and 'terrorise citizens.'

Given that the protestors are not politically organised which could well see Islamists eventually gaining control of the anti-regime demonstrations, a new leadership possibly backed by the military may emerge to replace Mubarak.

Regional Response

With Tunisian leader Ben Ali fleeing to Saudi Arabia and Hosni Mubarak facing massive protests, other Arab rulers have become alarmed and some have announced social and economic incentives to check the rising popular discontent. Syrian President Bashar al Assad has stated that the protests in Tunisia and Egypt will not spread to his country but at the same time he also noted that “there is a lesson for everyone.”

While the protests escalated in Tunisia, neighbouring Algeria also saw large numbers of young people taking to the streets in Algiers complaining against unemployment, corruption, bureaucracy, and lack of political reform. Three people were killed and hundreds injured in these protests. However, the protests have not escalated in the same way as in Tunisia or in Egypt. The government has promised to check rising food prices and address other issues of concern.

Reacting to the revolution in Tunisia, Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi said that “There is none better than Zine to govern Tunisia. Tunisia now lives in fear.”⁶ Gaddafi is the longest serving ruler in Africa and the West Asian region, having been in power for 41 years now. Protest of any kind is strictly prohibited, but even so there were reports of unrest in some places.

King Abdullah II of Jordan dismissed Prime Minister Samir Rifai and his cabinet on February 1 after widespread protests inspired by demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia. The King has also asked Marouf Bakhit to form a new cabinet. The King was under pressure from opposition groups which are demanding more political and economic reforms.⁷ Zaki Bani Irsheid, leader of the Islamic Action Front, an arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, said his party’s main demands were dismissal of the government and the dissolution of parliament.⁸

There have been huge protests in Yemen as well. The country which has already been plagued by the activities of al Qaeda, Houthi rebels, poverty and unemployment is now facing demonstrations by opposition groups demanding President Ali Abdullah Saleh to go. A worried Saleh issued a decree calling a joint meeting of the Parliament and Shura councils to be held on February 2. But the opposition called for a boycott of the joint session. In recent weeks Saleh has ordered to absorb 25 per cent of college students in governmental institutions, exempt students from paying the remaining tuition fees in the

⁶ “Mid-East: Will there be a domino effect?,” *BBC News*, January 28, 2011, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12204971>

⁷ “Jordan’s King Abdullah II ousts prime minister, cabinet in wake of mass protests,” *Washington Post*, February 1, 2011, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpyn/content/article/2011/01/31/AR2011013103692.html?wprss=rss_world

⁸ *Ibid.*

universities, to establish a fund for university graduates to create jobs, to expand the social security network, and an increase in salaries for the armed forces and government employees.⁹

Israel has expressed deep concerns over the situation in Egypt. In a statement on January 31, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that his country's primary concern is that the crisis in Egypt could create a situation in which the Muslim Brotherhood may emerge as a major player, which could endanger bilateral relations. Referring to the Iranian revolution of 1979 he stated that "In a state of chaos, an organised Islamic group can take over a country. It has happened. It happened in Iran." Netanyahu said that, "A takeover of oppressive regimes of extreme Islam violates human rights, grinds them to dust ... and in parallel also pose a terrible danger to peace and stability."¹⁰

After giving shelter to Ben Ali of Tunisia, Saudi Arabia has moved on to throw its weight behind Mubarak. According to reports, King Abdullah called up Mubarak and expressed his support for the government and people of Egypt.¹¹ King Abdullah condemned the protesters as "intruders" who were "tampering with Egypt's security and stability ... in the name of freedom of expression." The Saudi royal family would not support any kind of popular uprising in the Arab world as the kingdom itself is vulnerable to such protests, and also for the fact that the developments in Egypt may also lead to strengthening of the radical elements in Saudi society.

Iran, on the other hand, is happy to see the Egyptian protesters on the streets as it feels that the protests are a revolutionary struggle against the "despotic", secular, western "puppets". Iran also claims that the Egyptian demonstrators are inspired by the 1979 Islamic Revolution that toppled the US-backed Shah.¹² A statement signed by 214 legislators pledged strong "spiritual" support for Egyptians in opposing "the tyranny of their rulers". It also condemned "efforts by certain western countries as well as the Zionist regime to exhaust the uprising and separate it from Islamic values."¹³ Iranian hardliners feel that Mubarak should face the same fate as the Shah of Iran in 1979.

⁹ "Tens of Sana'a University's Students Refuse Saleh's Order," *Yemen Post*, February 1, 2011, available at <http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=3087&MainCat=3>

¹⁰ "Israel worried about Islamic takeover in Egypt," *Arab News*, January 31, 2011, available at <http://arabnews.com/middleeast/article248059.ece>

¹¹ "Saudi Arabia's dilemma: what if Ben Ali warrant arrives," *The National*, January 30, 2011, available at <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/middle-east/saudi-arabias-dilemma-what-if-ben-ali-warrant-arrives?pageCount=0>

¹² "Iran hails Egyptian protests but ignores inconvenient truths," *The National*, February 1, 2011, available at <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/middle-east/iran-hails-egyptian-protests-but-ignores-inconvenient-truths>

¹³ "Egypt revolt has Iran in a spin," *The Guardian*, February 1, 2011, available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/01/egypt-revolt-iran-simon-tisdall?CMP=twtd_fd

International Response

Egypt's closest ally is the United States, which provides \$1.2 billion in military aid annually, making the country's armed forces heavily dependent on American goodwill. Egypt is a close US ally in the war on terror. Washington's primary concern in Egypt is a stable and friendly government to maintain peace with Israel, and support anti-terror policies. Unrest in the country worries the US government because of Egypt's regional importance and the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood. The State Department issued neutral statements about the unrest. President Obama has stressed that "Now, it is not the role of any other country to determine Egypt's leaders. Only the Egyptian people can do that. What is clear — and what I indicated tonight to President Mubarak — is my belief that an orderly transition must be meaningful, it must be peaceful, and it must begin now. Furthermore, the process must include a broad spectrum of Egyptian voices and opposition parties. It should lead to elections that are free and fair. And it should result in a government that's not only grounded in democratic principles, but is also responsive to the aspirations of the Egyptian people."¹⁴

The European Union (EU) is also heavily invested in Egypt as a security partner. Additionally, the EU is Egypt's largest trading partner, with 10 per cent of the country's agricultural products coming from EU member states. Although Brussels is primarily concerned with regional stability, trade and peace with Israel, EU-Egypt action plans have openly stated that part of their efforts would also try to improve democratic institutions within Egypt. Thus it is no surprise that the EU called for an orderly transition to a broad-based government in Egypt, saying democratic reforms were needed to create the conditions for free and fair elections. It said transition in the Arab world's most populous country should "respect the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, paving the way for free and fair elections."¹⁵

The African Union (AU) which is composed of democratic and non-democratic countries chose to stay clear of the events in Tunisia and Egypt. A summit of AU leaders is currently underway in Ethiopia, where South Africa and is expected to broach the subject of the ongoing crisis.

In the only official commentary on the uprising, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Hong Lei, said, "Egypt is a friend of China and we hope Egypt will return to social stability and normal order as soon as possible." Although ambiguous the statement keeps with China's policy of non-interference in other countries' domestic issues. However, the Chinese government is evacuating its citizens from Egypt. Additionally, internet searches for the word Egypt are being censored in China.

¹⁴ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/01/remarks-president-situation-egypt>

¹⁵ <http://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFLDE70U27N20110131?sp=true>

Impact on Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process

The ongoing crisis in Egypt is bound to have its implications on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Egypt has played the role of chief mediator aside from the United States in the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Egypt under Mubarak has been Israel's strongest ally in the region while also being a staunch ally of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Although Israeli discourse advocates support for democratic governments in the Arab region, analysts see Israel as desiring to maintain the status quo in order that the stalled peace process does not gather momentum in support of the Palestinians. Despite the peace treaty with Egypt, Israel is seen as favouring this "cold peace"¹⁶ rather than having to face a new democratic government that is composed of radical groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood that may not be favourably inclined to maintaining relations with Israel. While the Muslim Brotherhood has stayed out of the limelight during the protests, a former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations has stated that Israel is "concerned"¹⁷, possibly at the prospect of the party winning in any fresh elections. Israel's concerns would also focus on its Rafah border with Egypt. Israeli political commentators point out that "the Israeli army has not budgeted anything over the last 30 years for dealing with a strategic threat from Egypt."¹⁸ With both Egypt and Israel blockading the Gaza Strip for more than three years to weaken Hamas in the Gaza Strip, a change in regime in Egypt would mean a more insecure situation in Gaza. Although the United States will play the lead role in any future substantial agreements on the peace negotiations, Israel will have to find new support in the region (its alliance with Turkey having collapsed last year following the Israeli raid on the Turkish-led aid flotilla destined to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza). Israeli media analysts have also observed the "limitations of intelligence (within Egypt as well as in Israel), of the experts and interpreters to follow and understand the general public spirit"¹⁹; the possibility of a mass Palestinian uprising in Israeli-controlled territories cannot be ruled out. The use of lethal force by the Israelis has not stopped peaceful demonstrations in West Bank villages such as Bilin.

The Palestinian reaction to the events in Egypt has been subdued. The PA and the Hamas government in Gaza have maintained silence so far, possibly to avoid jeopardizing any future Egyptian support for an independent Palestinian state.

¹⁶ "Mubarak's Role and Mideast Peace," *The New York Times*, February 1, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/01/31/mubaraks-role-and-mideast-peace/the-view-from-israel>

¹⁷ "Egypt protests: Israel watches anxiously," *BBC News*, February 2, 2011, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12338222>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "The price Mubarak will have to pay," *Haaretz*, January 29, 2011, available at <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/mess-report/the-price-mubarak-will-have-to-pay-1.339964>

Impact on oil market

While Egypt itself does not directly provide a great deal of oil to the international market, any instability in the region is a cause for concern among traders. The price of crude witnessed a hefty rise. The price of oil rose to \$92.19 on January 31, 2011, its highest level since October 2008, and up from \$85.64 on January 24, as investors priced in the higher probability of an interruption in oil supplies. Currently, Brent crude stands at around \$100 a barrel.

The real problems with regard to the impact of the Egyptian crisis on the oil market are many. While events in Egypt do not present a huge risk to oil supplies as Egypt is a marginal oil producer, it could change if dissent spreads to other oil-exporting nations, given that the economic grievances present in Egypt are there across the Middle East. Egypt has only moderate amounts of oil and gas. Currently, the main concern is transport through the Suez Canal, though there is no indication of the oil flow being impeded at this point. The present situation, unlike the crisis of 1956, is not likely to have any affect on the operations in the Suez Canal for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the region would not like to see a repeat of the 1956 political and military imbroglio vis-à-vis the Suez Canal. Second, eight per cent of international sea trade uses this canal. Approximately 45 to 50 ships transit through this canal daily. Third, Egypt earns an average annual revenue of around \$4.7 billion from the canal; in December 2010 alone this figure stood at \$390 million²⁰. Fourth, the canal accounts for approximately 2.5 per cent of Egypt's GDP.²¹ But this is a fluid situation, and the likelihood of supply cuts elsewhere in the region as the popular uprisings increase, are a genuine concern. The concern emanates from the possibility of reactionary elements gaining control in places that have a more immediate impact on the flow of energy. Most significantly, while Egypt does not provide a great amount of the global supply of oil and gas, it does control about 5 percent of its delivery.

Implications for India

India has had close historical and civilisational contacts with Egypt. During the Nehru-Nasser era both countries had exceptionally close relations. India has enjoyed close cooperation with the Mubarak regime since he came to power. Egypt is the largest country in terms of population in the Arab League, with around 75 per cent of the total population under the age of 40 and with a literacy rate of 71 per cent. This makes Egypt an important country with a young, skilled and well educated work force.²² The image of India among

²⁰ "Suez Canal revenues reach \$390 mln in December," *thedailynewsegypt.com*, January 11, 2010 available at <http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/archive/suez-canal-revenues-reach-390-mln-in-december.html>

²¹ "Suez Canal revenue up to \$427.3 mln in October," *thedailynewsegypt.com*, November 8, 2010, available at <http://thedailynewsegypt.com/economy/suez-canal-revenue-up-to-4273-mln-in-october-dp1.html>

²² India and Arab States: Exploring New Horizons, Delhi, Confederation of Indian Industry, 2010, p. 58.

both the regime and the people of Egypt is that of a benign country. India is an emerging economic power and a responsible player in international organisations; therefore, any regime that comes to power in Egypt would like to keep close relations with India. In case the situation goes out of control, which is unlikely, there may be a temporary gap in political ties till things settle down. From India's point of view, there will be serious implications if the Egyptian unrest spreads to the Arab world where India has higher stakes. An important concern for India is the 3600 people of Indian origin living in Egypt. Some 2200 members of Indian community are in Cairo. India has already evacuated 300 people from there.

Further, Egypt's strategic location along the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal provides it a significant advantage vis-à-vis bilateral trade and tourism. In the economic arena Egypt remains an important partner of India. India has been among the top five importers of Egyptian products since 2005. The trade balance has been in favour of Egypt since 2001-02 except in 2004-05. Exports from India to Egypt have been increasing over the years. It increased to \$ 1.3 billion during 2009-2010 from 1.29 billion in 2008-09. Total trade declined from \$3.42 in 2007-08 to 2.46 in 2008-09 and then increased to \$2.7 billion during July-May 2010. In terms of investments, India has a total investment of about \$2 billion in about 40 projects and Egyptian investment in India is about US\$ 30 million.²³

Egypt has 3.5 per cent of Africa's proven oil reserves which makes it an important country for India. Oil discoveries in the offshore waters of Egypt have immense potential. GAIL, Reliance Industries, and Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation are key players in the natural gas and petroleum sectors of Egypt. In the manufacturing sector Tata Motors, Ashok Leyland, Bajaj Auto and Aditya Birla Group in real estate and construction sectors are some of the important Indian companies having stakes in the country. Any instability in Egypt will have an adverse impact upon Indian companies involved there. A peaceful transition will provide continuity. Any increase in oil prices due to the instability in the country will also have implications for India.²⁴

First, the sharp rise in Brent crude will affect India because Brent has 32 per cent weightage in the Indian crude basket. The Indian crude basket is hovering at a much lower \$94 per barrel currently. But that is five per cent more than the price in December when the average price of the Indian basket was \$89.78 per barrel. On January 31, PSU oil firms hiked jet fuel prices by 4.5 per cent, the biggest hike in almost a year, on the back of spiralling international oil prices.

²³ <http://meaindia.nic.in/meaxpsite/foreignrelations/egypt.pdf> accessed on February 1, 2011.

²⁴ India and Arab States: Exploring New Horizons, Delhi, Confederation of Indian Industry, 2010, pp. 58-64.

Conclusion

The Egyptian crisis reflects a major shift in the Arab world. The impact of the crisis is such that Yemeni President Saleh has announced that he will not contest the next election in 2013. For his part, the Jordanian King has appointed a new Prime Minister. India at this point in time will have to adopt a cautious and well calibrated policy towards Egypt. India is carefully monitoring the wave of protests sweeping North Africa. Intelligence experts have warned of copy cat effect on Jammu and Kashmir. The Indian government has issued a nuanced statement that conceded that the street protests in Cairo reflected the people's desire for reform.

“India continues to closely follow the mass protests in Egypt which are an articulation of the aspirations of the Egyptian people for reform. It is hoped that the current situation will be resolved in a peaceful manner, in the best interests of the people of Egypt. India wishes that Egypt, a fellow developing country with which she enjoys close and traditional ties, will continue to be a strong and stable nation, contributing to peace and prosperity in the region.”²⁵

In the past India has followed a policy of non- intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. However, it cannot shy away from its commitment and support to a peaceful mass movement for political reform. What we are witnessing in West Asia and North Africa at present is a fundamental shift in the very foundations of the regional political order. The mass protests in Egypt and earlier in Tunisia signal the disgruntlement and dissatisfaction of people with authoritarian regimes that have ruled over them for decades; what the people want is a democratic system. In this environment, as a democratic nation, India needs to back the peaceful transition acceptable to the people of Egypt.

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²⁵ India, Ministry of External Affairs, *Press Release*, at <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530217128>.