The Old Order Lives

Contributed by Pita Ochai
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The Muslim Brotherhood group, the main opposition party in Egypt, loses more seats in the National Assembly election just concluded, thus paving the way for the old order represented by the National Democratic Party, NDP, to gain more political control

Once again, election in Egypt has failed to alter the familiar political structure of the country. On November 28, the National Democratic Party, NDP, which is led by President Hosni Mubarak, the third in the late Gamal Abdel Nasser dynasty, won more than two-thirds of the legislative seats in Egypt’s parliamentary elections. This victory came at the expense of the embattled Muslim Brotherhood, the country’s biggest opposition party. The Brotherhood’s political fortune suffered a decline when it lost its parliamentary seats to the NDP and independent candidates. Before last week’s election, the Muslim Brotherhood controlled 20 percent of parliament. But, this is no more. The Brotherhood, which was banned in 1954, by Nasser’s government, attributed the setback it suffered in the election to political intimidation and electoral fraud by the ruling NDP. Essam Elerian, Muslim Brotherhood’s spokesman, said the intimidation and violence orchestrated by security agents against the Brotherhood months before the election adversely affected its performance at the polls. The Muslim Brotherhood and other civil society groups complained that the NDP used violence to prevent their candidates from monitoring the electoral process. Elerian accused the outgoing parliament, which was also dominated by the NDP, of introducing series of measures that put the elections process in the hands of the Ministry of Interior and minimised the ability of the opposition parties to monitor them. Intimidation meted on the Brotherhood was illustrated by the arrest and detention of more than 70 of its supporter by the Egyptian police for breaching an electoral law. They were accused of using posters with religious slogans for election purposes. But, Elerain pointed out that candidates of the NDP who violated the same legislation were not punished by the security agents. Notwithstanding, the Brotherhood comforted itself that it succeeded in winning the people’s love and support and a media battle that exposed the irregularities during the elections. The NDP, however, agreed that minimal violations took place during the election. Magdy El Dakkak, leader of the NDP political education committee, said that in spite of few cases of violations, the election did not turn into a heated violent battle as was claimed by the opposition parties. According to him, the success of the NDP at polls last week, was anticipated because of the party’s achievements over the years. He attributed the losses suffered by the Brotherhood to the entrance of new political parties in the election, pointing out that politics in the country has transcended a game of dual contest between the NDP and the Brotherhood. Amr Hamzaway, a senior researcher at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said the recent election has succeeded in creating a lot more discord among the different parties in the country. Hamzaway said the Muslim Brotherhood which lost much of its seats to other parties will not be happy as the election was not free and fair. On the other hand, other opposition parties that participated and gained seats in the parliament did so at the risk of losing their popularity before the Egyptian people for participating in an unfair election. Those which refused to participate in the elections, like the National Association for Change, which is led by Mohammed El Baradei, former UN nuclear chief, would continue to nurse grievances against the ruling party for its absence from the polls. Leo Otoide, senior lecturer, department of International Studies and Diplomacy, University of Benin, said the success of the NDP in last week’s election and the protest that followed had one implication: Egypt is sitting on a keg of gun-powder. Egypt’s government since 1952, when King Farouk was overthrown, has been having legitimacy problem. It has also continued to lack the ability to transform itself into a credible democratic country. Nasser faced the problem of instituting a democratic regime in the country, and he could not achieve it. Anwar Sadat, his successor, also failed up till the time he was felled by the assassins’ bullet. Mubarak became the military leader of the country in 1981, after the assassination of Sadat on October 6, 1981, by soldiers who were opposed to his signing of the Israeli- Egypt Peace Treaty. He contested the presidential election in 1987, and won. He repeated this in the 1993, 1999 and 2005 presidential elections under the banner of the NDP. Mubarak launched a big crackdown on Muslim fundamentalist opposition groups to quell the upsurge in guerrilla violence by Islamic extremists. He survived an assassination attempt in June 1995, in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. In November 1995, just before parliamentary elections, Mubarak’s government accused the Muslim Brotherhood of aiding violent Islamic groups. Many of the Muslim Brotherhood’s members were arrested, and several who planned to run in the elections or monitor them were tried and sentenced to prison. Critics accused the government of trying to eliminate even peaceful opponents. Reported by Cinderella Amos Storm Over 250,000 Secret Memos Pita Oc

As the world reacts to the release of more than 250,000 US secret memos written by its diplomats, the Chinese government has blocked Internet access to WikiLeaks, the website source of the information. In a statement issued by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the government said the action was taken to prevent any interruption in its relationship with the US. “China takes note of the US government’s reports. We hope the US side will handle the relevant issues. As for the content of the documents, we will not comment on that,” the statement said. Hong Lei, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, said that access to the WikiLeaks Cable gate page as well as certain Chinese language news articles covering the topic have been blocked in the country since Monday, November 29. The information released by WikiLeaks exposed a document that linked Politburo, a Chinese company, to the December 2009 hack of Google’s computer systems. Although the cable does not provide conclusive proof linking China to the Google attack, it supports the concern that the Chinese government has sponsored organised hacking attempts against US computers. European countries have reacted with irritation to the release of the documents, which described Angela Merkel, German chancellor, as being “risk averse” and Vladimir Putin, Russian president, as an

“alpha dog.” It compared Nicolas Sarkozy, French president, to “an emperor with no clothes thin-skinned and authoritarian.” Among the comments released by the website is a reported conversation in which a senior adviser to the French president branded Hugo Chavez, Venezuelan president, as crazy and Iran as a fascist state. Francois Baron, French government spokesperson, said the website is a threat to democracy and pledged to support the US in defending diplomatic secrecy. “We have to be very attentive and united at a state level to fight what is a threat to democratic authority and sovereignty. The protection of states is something serious, it’s about the protection of men, of women and citizens,” he said. Ready for War Cinderella Amos The fear of possible outbreak of war between the South Korea and North Korea is not yet over. The joint military exercise undertaken by South Korea and the United States further aggravated the tension between the two Korean countries. The joint military exercise that lasted for four days, between Sunday, November 28 and Wednesday, December 1, was undertaken to demonstrate the readiness of South Korea to go to war if North Korea dares it. Lee Myung-bak, South Korean president, said his country would retaliate any further provocation by the North. During a visit to the US forces in South Korea, Lee said: “North Korea would pay the price in the event of further provocations, noting that attacks on civilians is an inhumane crime that is strictly forbidden in time of war. Now is the time to show action than words.” The joint military demonstration was a response to the November 23, missile attack by North Korea on the South military base which resulted in the death of four South Koreans. The attack led to protests and demonstrations against the North in most cities of the South. In Seoul, the Southern capital, about 500 former soldiers and ex-police burned flags and effigies of Kim Jong-il, the North Korean leader. Nevertheless, China has proposed emergency talks in a bid to resolve the standoff between the rival Korea countries. It is also initiating moves to rein in its ally, the North Korea which depends on China for aid. The Chinese government is worried of a possible collapse of the North which would send pressure on its border with the influx of millions of refugees. The North Korean authorities have dismissed any possibility of talks that would end the crisis. A statement credited to a government official said countries responsible for the latest standoff should first hold talks before involving the North. The two Korea countries have technically been at war since 1950, despite a ceasefire they signed in 1953 to end a bloody three-year war. Then, the U.S. forces backed the South against North Korea, which was supported by China and Russia in the early years of the Cold War. Since the ceasefire agreement, the U.S. has maintained a military presence in South Korea. Yet, small-scale military clashes have periodically broken out at the demilitarised zone that divides the two countries.