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"TRIUMPH of DEMOCRACY" In EGYPT?

by *Nicholas F.S. Papanicolaou*

It is easy to fall in with the euphoria that now has taken hold in the aftermath of Hosni Mubarak's resignation on Feb. 11th. Already people in America and in the Middle East are exulting over the "triumph of democracy" in Egypt.

So it is perhaps not popular for some like me, to sound the alarm bell. Doing so does not mean I applaud the Mubarak government and its thirty years in power. It does mean that I see plenty of dangers ahead which need to be addressed in a realistic way lest Egypt become another radical Islamic state.

In the 2005 elections the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) fielded twenty percent of the vote in the Egyptian elections. In any upcoming elections they are likely to gain even more of the vote. But at twenty percent, they already have gained a powerful voice within Egypt's power structure.

Also, The National Intelligence Director, James Clapper, testified Feb. 10th before Congress and said that the MB in Egypt has renounced violence. Can we believe that the MB is now a benevolent, civic minded, non violent force in Egypt?

Let us look at two examples from other countries, to see if they provide any guidance for what may well develop in Egypt. In late 1944, as the Nazis withdrew from occupied Greece, communist guerillas who were supplied by Stalin, were trying to take over the country by force. In a country of about seven million people, they numbered less than 15,000 people in total, including some 5,000 men under arms and 10,000 people who accompanied them, some of whom had been forcibly abducted from their villages.

Yet the power they wielded was completely disproportionate to their numbers. They controlled most politicians through sheer fear of physical violence. The government of national unity, under George Papandreou (grandfather of the present prime Minister of Greece) was yielding to their demands. One of their demands was that the armed



communist guerillas be included in the regular Greek Army, which they would then ruthlessly co-opt and neutralize, or take over. With the government cowering to their demands, Winston Churchill visited Athens on Christmas Day 1944 to face the communists down. He had the personal courage, and the power of what was left of the British and Greek armies, to reject their demands. They tried to blow him up as well as the entire British Embassy that day by planting a mega bomb under the Embassy, but thankfully did not succeed.

But what would have happened if there was no Winston Churchill and no loyal Greek and British Army to face the communists down?

A second example is the Islamic party of Prime Minister Erdogan in Turkey. A little more than ten years ago the Turkish military allowed this party to participate in Turkey's national elections. They fielded some ten percent of the vote in their first election. But within ten years they had gained an absolute majority, and began to dismantle the secular Turkish state founded by Kemal Ataturk in 1923. Today Turkey is very firmly on the road to Islamization, and is participating in the disruption of the other secular regimes in the area, such as Iraq and Jordan.

The prospects for Egypt are fraught with danger.

The Muslim Brotherhood will, I expect, be exerting every type of influence it can in order to gain control of the country in the next five years.

Some of this influence will be through the polls, some will be based on religious fervor, and some will inevitably be based on fear of violence.

A big burden has now been placed on the Egyptian military, but the military could also go the same way Iran's went in 1979 when the ayatollahs took over. Iran's top military brass was summarily executed with the return to the country of ayatollah Khomeini. So let us be sensitive to the dangers facing Egypt.

Democracy has not yet won.

It will be a long road.

Free passage through the Suez Canal and the peace treaty with Israel (Camp David Accords) hang in the balance; so does the continuation of the joint arms embargo imposed on Gaza and Hamas by Israel and Mubarak's Egypt.

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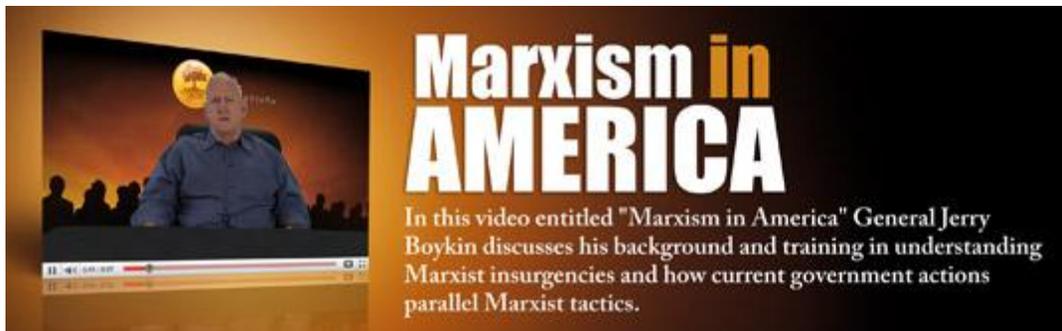
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