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### Awakenings

Seif Eddin Abdel Rahman

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Seif Eddin S. Abdel Rahman

### Awakenings

I love Egypt. This was the sentiment that struck me after what Egypt encountered a couple of months ago. Sure, the impact of such words might have been diluted slightly by the fact that I have moderately been involved in what has been taking place, but it is hard - no, impossible - not to be moved by what has been happening in Egypt for almost two months now.

I will admit; at first, I was very skeptical of what such a protest would be capable of. There has always been a potent strain of apathy and satisfaction with the status quo, regardless of how terrible it might be for some people, which plagued Egyptians since as far back as I can recall. We used to think that the situation can never, and will never change; a president that has been around for 30 years cannot possibly be supplanted, and even if he were to pass away, his son would immediately succeed him. Corruption ran rampant; unchecked but hardly unnoticed. Elements of the police possessed a sense of entitlement that enabled them to walk as Gods among Egyptians, the rules applying to everyone but them. In short, it was a dire situation, but everyone seemed okay with this scenario.

Then January the 25th came along. That morning, the country seemed to be so quiet. Not the serene sort of quiet, but rather the tense expectant one. It was interesting, because, as I said before, we seemed not to care, so what were we expecting? Yet everyone knew, in the bottom of their hearts, that the 25th of January would be something special, and by God, it was.

It was as if the people's will had suddenly taken shape; their hopes and desires that always seemed quashed by the regime's tyranny exploded in unison. They took to Tahrir Square, often called "Liberation Square" by the foreign media, and loudly expressed their demands in a most civil and peaceful manner. It was obvious that no one, the regime least of all, expected this

sort of turn out. A friend who was there said that there could not have been less than 250,000 people in Tahrir that night, all shouting as one: 'The People Want The Regime To Fall'.

The ball was now in the regime's court, and it was the worst possible play they could have made. Content with a system that always worked so well for them, they decided that the use of violence to force the protest to dissipate would be their method of responding to the people's demands, insisting on their motto of "Hey, why fix that which is not broken?" What they did not expect however, was the people's reaction. A friend once told me 'It's strange. I have been to protests before, but as soon as the first tear gas grenade was fired, or the water hoses started spraying us, people would dissipate and go home. But not this time, I saw people praying on Qasr El Nil Bridge as the hoses sprayed them relentlessly. I saw people marching through the tear gas undaunted; picking up the grenades and throwing them back at the, previously considered unassailable, CSF forces. They will not stop!'

Yes, what the regime did not count on was the possibility of failure in containing the protests. They thought that throwing police forces at protesters and committing the most horrendous crimes against them would scare people into stopping and going home, but people did not stop. The barrier of fear and apathy had been shattered for good, and nothing could possibly repair it. The conclusion was inevitable; the regime had only a limited supply of CSF forces, while the people kept on pouring into the streets, merely to express their opinion. In the end, the people won out, and the CSF had to withdraw, if only to avoid the people's wrath at being attacked so viciously, by citizens of their own country, no less.

Strangely, this withdrawal coincided with a complete and utter disappearance of police forces all over the country. Some said that the police were now afraid to be in the streets; their 'God' image was no more, and people were eager for payback. The explanation seemed

ridiculous beyond belief; these forces had a duty to protect their countrymen, a duty they would foregone to cower in fear or, as some people said, to take up the mantle of thugs, terrorizing and vandalizing without reproach. A third 'coincidence' was the release/escape of prisoners from prisons, something that seemed almost too similar to what the CSF had been doing during their crusade against the protesters; releasing convicts from precincts to fight for them. I am not one to point fingers without proof, but I am only expressing my fascination with such incidents. Perhaps the regime thought 'Well, now that they are in constant fear for their lives, they will realize what they are missing, and they will stop.'

'Fat chance.' said Egyptians everywhere. People took to the streets, protecting their families and possessions with unprecedented fervor. They spent sleepless night after sleepless night, braving the cold and putting their lives on the line, just to show that they did not need the police. 'We do not need to suffer their brutality just so we would sleep soundly at night.'

Another plans, thwarted. 'What else can we do?' They must have thought. 'I know! Let's hire some thugs, call them pro-Mubarak protesters, and have them attack the people in Tahrir. Make it seem like the country is divided over the decision of whether to keep the president or not.' 'Brilliant! That will scare the protesters and make them go home, because they are so easily scared, as previously shown during their conflicts with the CSF.'

I knew that the country was run by a bunch of idiots, but damn it! Whose smart idea was that? Needless to say, after a long day of fighting with thugs, during which the army stood idly by, the peaceful protesters won the day. No words could express my disgust at the people who saw fit to attack and kill their own people just to scare them into submission, but it was as if the blood that flowed that day strengthened people's wills even more. The few who'd been taken in

by the president's promises just the night before saw them for the lies they were. Protesters stood their ground, and so the thuggish interlude was for naught.

Right now, many people are asking the protesters to leave the square, citing many reasons. Some say that their demands were obvious, and that the regime would need some time to implement them. Some say that they are causing economic losses by bringing the country to a standstill. Some say that they are misguided and being led along through 'foreign influence'. Some cite the concessions the regime has already made as means of convincing the people that they have won. I will not get into those arguments right now, but I will only say that I do not agree with any of them; the people in Tahrir are not causing harm to the country, they are revolting against years of oppression that generations have endured silently and willingly. They are trying to bring about an age of freedom and progress that Egypt has been in need of. They want to be done with the tyranny and oppression that have been the country's staples for far too long. These goals are too noble, too pure to be contested through such weak arguments.

I will only quote what one person says: 'No price is too high, when freedom is on the line.' The people who were, and still are, and will be in Tahrir until their demands are met make me proud. I cannot put into words how I feel when I think of people who have endured and sacrificed so much. Respect? Admiration? Such words seem so small and bland in comparison. So, I will just say 'Thank you.' Thank you for loving this country and wanting to make it better, thank you for reminding a lot of us that we love this country, thank you for making us all feel proud of being Egyptians again, thank you for showing the world what Egyptians are truly capable of, and very generally, thank you for existing.

As I said in the beginning, I love Egypt. I have never truly knew how that is supposed to feel, but due to those men and women, now I do.