



THE OLD GUARD

Ahmed Shafik and the Call for Security

By Abdel Monem Said Aly

With the fall of President Hosni Mubarak, it appeared to many observers that revolutionary forces had won the day. It is therefore worth reflecting on the results of Egypt's democratic election for president, held in two rounds in May and June.

To the surprise of some, Ahmed Shafik, a military officer who served as minister of Civil Aviation and was prime minister at the time of Mubarak's resignation from office, came in second in a crowded field of thirteen candidates. Running as an independent, he then moved to the second round in a run-off with Mohammed Morsi, the candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party of the Muslim Brotherhood. Here he was defeated, but not before winning the votes of 12.3 million Egyptians—48.27 percent of those voting. Shafik's candidacy, therefore, serves as an important window on Egypt's political evolution.

From Pilot to Prime Minister

Ahmed Shafik served as Egypt's prime minister for only a month amid a rapidly changing political situation. On January 29, 2011, in response to the revolution, Mubarak removed Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif and replaced him with Shafik, a man with long experience in both the military and the government.

Shafik was born in Cairo in November 1941, and after graduating from the Egyptian Air Academy, he joined the Egyptian Air Force at the age of 20. Later in his career, he gained a master's degree in military sciences and a Ph.D. in aerospace studies. He served as a fighter pilot and as squadron, wing, and base commander, as well as a two-year stint as military attaché in Rome.

From 1988 to 1991, Shafik served in several senior military command positions before he was appointed

◀ Independent presidential candidate Ahmed Shafik, Tanta, May 11, 2012. *Khalil Hamra/Associated Press*

as the commander of the Air Operations Department. In September 1991, he became Air Force chief-of-staff, and was commander of the Egyptian Air Force from 1996 to 2002. He attained the rank of air marshal.

During the War of Attrition with Israel between 1967 and 1970, Shafik saw active service as a Multi-Task Air Wing Commander. Subsequently, he took up a post as an air base commander. In the 1973 October War, he was a senior fighter pilot under the command of Hosni Mubarak, then the head of the Egyptian Air Force. It is reported that Shafik shot down two Israeli aircraft during the war, both on October 14, 1973. During his forty years as a fighter pilot, he flew several types of Soviet, French, and American fighter jets. These included the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-17, Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-19, Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-21 and the Dassault Mirage 2000. He is qualified on the American-built McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II and the General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcon.

After his military career, Shafik served in Mubarak's government as minister of Civil Aviation from 2002 to 2011. He upgraded Egyptian airport management and infrastructure, and improved relations with domestic and international carriers as well as regulatory authorities. He restructured the national carrier, EgyptAir, and managed to achieve a turnaround in the company's performance. He is credited with modernizing Egyptian airports, and transforming the Cairo International Airport into a regional hub through the inauguration of Terminal 3 in 2008. The airport now has an annual capacity of twenty-two million passengers.

After becoming prime minister at the height of the worst crisis faced by the Mubarak presidency, Shafik resigned on March 3, 2011, in the face of intense pressure from protestors and the political opposition. Seen as a member of Mubarak's old guard, the protestors objected to Shafik staying on as head of the government since Mubarak was out.

Mubarak had calculated that Shafik's success as a minister could help deflate the crisis. However, Shafik came into the picture too late, and he was not free to form his own cabinet—as he communicated to the public. He tried to repair the cabinet after Mubarak's fall, but was unsuccessful due to pressure from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) as well as the limits of time.

Although he resigned from office, he had attracted a following, which eventually encouraged him to run for president. In a poll conducted by the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in August 2011, he scored 11.7 percent, second only to Amr Moussa, the longtime foreign minister and ex-Secretary General of the Arab League. He had received three times more support than opposition figure Mohamed ElBaradei. To explain the backing Shafik received, it is necessary to review the dramatic events that have shaken the country.

Fall of the Pharaoh

As Charles Dickens wrote of the French Revolution,

*It was the best of times,
It was the worst of times,
It was the age of wisdom,
It was the age of foolishness...*

Like Paris before it, Cairo is experiencing a period of transformation with a very long list of problems and challenges, a period when risks seem abundant and opportunities as elusive as ever. What's happening in Egypt can be summarized in two sentences: first, the country will never again be what it was. And second, the change is so tectonic that Egypt's future direction has never been more uncertain. The range of possibilities run from a stable democracy to a state where the 'Pharaoh' may be gone but a breed of despotic Pharaohism—this time in the name of Islam—remains.

Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt for thirty years. Yet, the ruler was toppled in just eighteen days. From being the most powerful man in the land, he has become a prisoner. Such a sweeping change in Egyptian politics is not customary. This could not have occurred without a long list of reasons.

The proposition I make is that Mubarak stayed in power for three decades because he was capable of using his office to keep a critical mass of Egyptians standing by him. He lost that ability not only on the day of the uprising, January 25, 2011, but in 2010 when he decided to run for a sixth term of office while he was aging and ill. By then, the deterioration of his qualities had made it impossible for him to understand the structural changes that were occurring in the country, some of them of his own making.

Mubarak, for example, failed to register the youth bulge that had expanded in the country since the 1990s partly as a result of the sharp decline in national infant mortality. The result was that some 25 percent of Egyptians were between the ages of eighteen and thirty years old by 2010. These 'baby boomers' came to the Egyptian stage while the country was moving towards a market economy. A brand new middle class was born, and searched for its place in the economic and political life of the country.

Then there was the media explosion that put the entire political system in question. At least 22.6 million Egyptians, mostly young people, had access to the Internet at the time of the revolution. By June 2009, Egypt had 3,211 Internet technology companies, mostly run by the new generation who would later be in the forefront of the uprising. Add to that the great expansion of legacy media in Egypt and throughout

the Arab world that challenged government control. The number of daily newspapers in Egypt grew to twenty-one, not to mention 523 other types of publications; and there are some seven hundred Arabic language television channels available in the region. In Egypt alone, there were fifty-four television channels as of June 2010; thirty-one of them privately owned.

This rapid growth of the media opened a flood gate for criticism of public authorities, from the most minor bureaucrat all the way up to the president. Government corruption, the inequitable distribution of wealth, the economic plight of the country, responsibility for Palestinian suffering, and the like all became daily subjects for talk shows, bloggers, the electronic press, the opposition press, and the media at large, which effectively succeeded in the total de-legitimization of the Mubarak regime.

The “inheritance of power” issue became a central theme in Egyptian politics and thus fueled the de-legitimization of the regime. To many commentators (and much of the public), the idea that the Mubarak’s son, Gamal, might “inherit” the presidency was a sign that not only was the regime corrupt, but it was moving to create a monarchy in place of the republic. It was treason in the making.

Worse for the Mubarak regime, the Gamal succession ‘problem’ became associated with the union of political power and wealth, and the widespread corruption in the country. The World Bank, Freedom House, Transparency International, and other international governmental and non-governmental organizations ranked Egypt low in the various indicators of the fight against corruption, the integrity of public officials, and transparency.

In the context of an ossified political system monopolized by a ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) that does not allow much of a progressive political agenda, the stage was set for the revolution. The regime—and the traditional opposition—failed to absorb the new and growing opposition emerging from youth movements, which were widening the gap between the aging political elite and the Egyptian people.

The regime missed the opportunity from 2006 to 2007 to make fundamental constitutional reforms despite major political and legal efforts to do so by amending Article 76 on electing the president, Article 77 on limiting the terms of the presidency to two terms only, and Article 88 on limiting the powers of the president during the implementation of Emergency Law. (The continuous implementation of the Emergency Law for thirty years extended the powers of the police and other security institutions in the country.)

The increasing age of the president also played a role in accelerating the contradictions between the regime and Egyptians. Mubarak held a post with massive constitutional and political powers. But he had a weak presidency since he had no close advisors or national security and economic councils to rely on or listen

to. Despite his powers therefore, he was left to rely on the heads of security and the executive organs of the state. As he aged and grew ill, his stamina and ability to follow—let alone lead—the affairs of state was declining. A political vacuum emerged and was filled with those who were not only less popular, but also more corrupt. Major issues of state, foreign and domestic, were postponed because of the inability of the system to take decisions.

Thus Mubarak was becoming increasingly unable to face the storm that had been gathering in the country probably since the return to Egypt in February 2010 of a new opposition figure, Mohamed ElBaradei, former director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency and Nobel Peace laureate. In the fall of that year, Mubarak missed the opportunity to arrange free and fair elections and thus undermine his critics. The New Year's bombing of a Coptic church in Alexandria revealed the regime's inability to maintain security; Coptic Christians, as a result, began to desert Mubarak. When the storm finally broke on January 25, 2011, Mubarak seemed baffled and bewildered, incapable of managing the crisis and taking Egypt into another direction.

Clusters of Tensions

The transformation of a country is not easy. In Egypt, the Arab Spring is full of sandstorms. The post-revolutionary transition period—and all the players therein—reflects the enormity of Egypt's difficulties.

By surrendering powers to SCAF, Mubarak assured the continuity of the state as represented by three major institutions. SCAF would represent the sovereign authority of the president and its executive powers. The judiciary would play a key role in a system based on the rule of law as demanded by the revolutionaries. And the bureaucracy, historically the backbone of the Egyptian state, would survive the revolution in order to continue its tasks under new leadership.

On the other side are the revolutionaries. There are the youth who launched the revolution but were soon to lose control of events. Its leadership evolved into a large number of coalitions and new political parties but, whatever the magnitude of their number, they remain a highly fragmented movement. There are also the traditional political parties that worked as the formal and informal opposition to Mubarak's regime that reasserted themselves in the wake of his ouster. Third, there is the Muslim Brotherhood, part of the traditional political opposition and currently being reinforced by the rise of new Islamist parties. On the more liberal side is Al-Wasat, or Middle party, and on the more conservative side are the long-imprisoned Gama'at Al-Islamiya and Jihad groups. Then there is the new power of the Salafis, who advocate a strict implementation of Islamic *sharia*. And last but not least are the various non-party movements and civil society organizations that opposed Mubarak and his regime.

The organs of state and the revolutionary forces developed a formula that was summarized by the slogan: “The people and the army are one hand.” Some revolutionaries defined the situation as follows: the people made the revolution but the army protected it. This definition of what took place in Egypt both recognized the continuity of the Egyptian state and, simultaneously, understood the necessity for Egypt to go through a process of massive change.

It was inevitable that tensions would grow over a variety of issues. Local forces have started to take public affairs into their own hands, minorities work to assert their rights, and post-revolutionary protests continue to drag the economy down.

Three main clusters of tension have grown over time. The first is related to what the country should do with the former regime and the crimes it committed during the revolution, particularly Mubarak and his family. The second is focused on the road to be taken during the transition period to civilian rule. These tensions exist between various factions of the revolution, and between some of these factions and SCAF. And this inevitably led to the third cluster, which is all about how to deal with SCAF. Is SCAF the political leadership of the country and as such open to criticism and accountable to the public? Or does it remain part of the army, which should be honored for protecting the country and the revolution. And as such constitutes a ‘red line’ that revolutionaries may not cross?

Getting to this point was not easy, to say the least. An illustration of the nature of this ongoing struggle is the story of Omar Suleiman and his abrupt return to and exit from national politics. After fourteen months of silence after the fall of Mubarak, the former Egyptian vice president and head of General Intelligence decided to stand as a presidential candidate. It took him just twenty-four hours from bowing to the “will of the people” and obtaining 60,000 nomination signatures from the general public. His name jumped to the top of the list with over 30 percent of the vote in the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies’ weekly poll of support for presidential candidates.

The response to Suleiman’s candidacy was the return of the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies to Tahrir Square, while other revolutionary forces also made plans to come to the square the following Friday. Then the Islamist-dominated parliament amended the election law to prevent the top leadership of the former regime from participating in national elections. Faced with the unconstitutionality of this new ruling, the Islamist response was that revolutionary legitimacy reigns supreme over legalistic legitimacy. In the end, however, the Supreme Presidential Electoral Commission disqualified Suleiman’s candidacy on technical grounds—that he was actually a few signatures short of the required 60,000.

It is possible to think of post-revolutionary Egypt as a division between the power of the state and the power of the revolution. These sides essentially represent

two visions for the country: the civic and the religious. There has been some consensus—concerning the holding of elections, for example—but this has not been enough to clear a general air of confusion and suspicion. There is also a lack of complete trust in SCAF, as well as in the Islamist movement. As the revolutionary youth gradually lost their status to better organized and financed groups, they asserted themselves through sequential Friday demonstrations that led to confrontation with the police and the army.

Without doubt, Egypt has seen a number of changes that would have been unthinkable during the Mubarak era. The constitutional amendments of March 19, 2011, curtailed the president's powers and limited the period permitted in office to two four-year terms. For the first time since the July 23, 1952, revolution, Egypt witnessed free elections for the lower and upper chambers of parliament. Apparently, what remains to be done for Egypt to become a democratic country is to put a democratic constitution in place.

In terms of economic statistics, however, the country is going to ruin. According to all indicators, Egypt should have declared bankruptcy in 2011. By poverty indicators, the country is returning to where it was in 1990. Despite the decline, Egypt has proved capable of holding itself together, partly because of the reserves left from the Mubarak regime and partly because of its large informal economic sector—about 35 percent of the economy—but perhaps foremost thanks to the legendary Egyptian capacity for patience for better days to come.

The Message of Ahmed Shafik

It was in this context that the exclusion of Omar Suleiman from the presidential contest opened the door for two candidates to claim the representation of the state/civic side of the Egyptian political divide: Amr Moussa and Ahmed Shafik. Although the former dominated the air waves and was at the top of public opinion polls, the latter proved to be more popular with Egyptian voters. Most certainly Shafik was not the favorite son of the Egyptian political establishment, which clearly favored Suleiman initially and Moussa as a second choice. Shafik became the favorite target of the media and bands of revolutionaries who said his presidency would be a replica of the Mubarak regime.

An important reason for Shafik's success was his ability to send a strong message to the public about the necessity of restoring security, stability, and economic growth. He was also able to speak to an electorate that harbored growing apprehension about the rise of political Islam in Egypt.

Results in the presidential election showed a concentration of support for Shafik in Greater Cairo and in the Nile Delta. Broadly speaking, he gained in areas that are

more urban and less inclined to tribal or clannish politics. He did better in districts that have achieved economic progress, have a considerable middle class, and have also been hit by the decline in tourism.

Despite the Coptic Church's officially neutral stand in the election, Coptic Christians rallied behind Shafik for his civil state message and in fear of the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups. Shafik clearly stood for the equality of Egyptians and for a constitution that protects the rights of minorities. Consequently, Copts marshaled fellow Christians to the polling stations and contributed financially to his campaign.

Shafik also benefited from the unlikely resurrection of Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party. The party was legally dissolved after the revolution, and its membership scattered in disarray amid the bombardment of attacks against the corruption of the Mubarak regime. But Shafik, with his achievements in government service and a reputation for being clean, managed to energize the 2.5 million members of the former party. Shafik won political and financial support from the new parties gathering behind former NDP members, such as Al-Ithad, Al-Hurreiya, and the Egyptian National Party.

Many in Egypt's business community also rallied behind Shafik's candidacy. The sector has grown considerably over the last two decades, as Egypt went through a structural adjustment program of reform that was followed by a gradual transformation to a market economy. This new business class has been hard hit by the revolution particularly in tourist, construction, and industrial sectors. Many businessmen latched onto Shafik as a future president who could address instability due to continuing demonstrations and strikes. They financed his campaign and organized support in the industrial areas of Greater Cairo, the Delta, and in tourist regions like Luxor, the Red Sea, and South Sinai. Another factor in Shafik's respectable showing was support from the country's Sufi orders. Although the twelve million Sufis usually stay out of politics, its leadership has been closely connected to the NDP in the past.

One of Shafik's notable support bases, perhaps surprisingly to some, was the large number of Egyptians who admired the revolution but gradually soured on it due to the disruption it caused to their daily lives. While they could accept change, they could not tolerate economic regression, social and political disruption, and continued uncertainty. To many Egyptians, Shafik appeared to be a voice of reason and sanity, in contrast with a political opponent who prided himself for being part of the revolution. Shafik's clear message of restoring security and resuming economic growth was very attractive to an Egyptian public that had become tired of political divisions and a lack of progress in the political and economic agenda of the country.

Even in defeat, Shafik has however succeeded in forming a new political bloc that is supportive of the state and is civil in nature. This bloc—and Shafik himself, if he

chooses to continue in politics—does face a number of challenges. The first of these is reconciliation with opponents, particularly with the Islamist camp. After all, whichever way to look at it, half of the Egyptian voters are on the other side of the political divide. Another challenge, which comes from within Shafik's own camp, is a demand to depart from the old way of governing. Egypt has changed, and so must those associated with the former regime.

Although it has roots in the past, Shafik's bloc contains Egyptians who know that economic growth must be coupled with a democratic system and progressive ideas in society and politics.