Review of "FOREIGN POLICY AFTER TAHRIR REVOLUTION: (Re)-Defining the Role of Egypt in the Middle East" by Necati Anaz

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To cite this article: Necati Anaz (2012): FOREIGN POLICY AFTER TAHRIR REVOLUTION: (Re)-Defining the Role of Egypt in the Middle East, Strategic Analysis, 36:5, 830-832

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2012.712408

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his style has more in common with Wali Daccani than his contemporaries. Meeraji’s poetry thus flies in the face of the dominant trend of using Islamised Urdu that is heavily dependent on Persian and Arabic motifs.

Rehman’s work is not only a study of the historic evolution of Urdu, but it also delves into the contemporary and near contemporary aspects of the language. Thus, the book discusses the usage of Urdu in print, radio and on screen both in India and Pakistan. While his discussion manages to capture the debate, this is where the author misses a key point. After the divergence into modern Hindi and modern Urdu, the influence of English, which has led to the emergence of Hinglish and Urdlish, has reduced the distance between the two languages. Difficult Persian/Arabic and Sanskrit words in both languages are gradually being abandoned in favour of English words, thus leading to a greater convergence between modern spoken Hindi and spoken Urdu. Already, poets like Mustafa Ali Baig have started using English words in their poetry. However, the usage of English words is intended to invoke humour and make the poetry light-hearted. It would be interesting to see if English words are used in poetry that tends towards more serious or sombre themes.

With the rise of internet and social networking, barriers between the youth of India and Pakistan have broken down, and this digital exchange of content and ideas is bound to bring changes, just as the introduction of the printing press did in the 19th century. Hence, the book would have benefitted from a dedicated chapter on the influence of the internet on Urdu and Hindi. Perhaps all of this would make for a nice departure point for a sequel to the book.

An interesting topic that the author could have covered is the popularity of Urdu amongst children. Most lovers of Urdu lament the dwindling popularity of Urdu amongst the next generation, and this is a trend across Pakistan and India. The popularity of Urdu is directly related to the paucity of contemporary cartoons and comic books in the language, which can make the language more popular amongst the younger generation. In the age of mass media and graphic novels, it is indeed worrying that there has not been enough of a push in popularising Urdu through such contemporary media, especially considering the rich tradition of humour and satire in the language ever since the days of the Awadh Punch.

Despite missing a few aspects, Rehman’s work is a great asset for the uninitiated as well as the ahl-e-zubaan (speakers of the language). The author’s research is thorough and his style is lucid and effortless, like that of a storyteller. The book is indeed a labour of love for the language of love.

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Necati Anaz*

Recently, we have witnessed an unprecedented series of political events in the Middle East and North Africa after a young man from Tunisia had his vegetables
confiscated by the police. In retaliation, the young man set himself on fire, which initiated inextinguishable flames of protests and demonstrations demanding a more humane world for everyone. Protests and strikes driven by everyday people continued to sweep across the tightly controlled North African states. However, not everybody treated these unrests as a deep, socially rooted problem in society. Some saw these chaotic moments as temporary while others applied the policy of ‘wait and see’, but very few were able to point out the essence of the uprisings or answer the questions of ‘why’, ‘why these states’ and ‘why now’. In this regard, Ozkan’s timely book becomes critical, analysing Egypt’s socio-political structures which yielded a historical change in the country. The author argues that no one can fully understand the current situation in Egypt (and in the Arab world for that matter) without understanding the socio-political dynamics of the country in relation to the Palestinian–Israeli issues.

The author organises his book into sub-divisions wherein the readers can find several key questions that help to explain the post-Tahrir period in well-thought-out formulations rather than emotional evaluations. In this sense, the author first asks the question: Where can a middle-sized state (Egypt) be situated in international politics with regard to the Palestinian–Israeli issues? (p. 21). Attached to this question, Ozkan divides Cairo’s approach to the Palestinian issues. These issues constitute the backbone of Egypt’s international and regional positions, divided into five periods from the 1930s to the present. The first period (1930s–1948) includes Egypt’s complete independence from Britain. In the second period (1948–1957), the Palestinian issue becomes an Islamic one and so becomes Egypt’s issue as well. In the third period (1957–1967), Nasser after securing his position in the country defines the scope of Egypt’s foreign policy towards Palestine, embellishing it with ‘pan-Arabism’. The belief was that Arab unity would lead to the liberation of Palestine. In the fourth period (1967–1979), Egypt drops pan-Arabism and Islamic interests regarding Palestine issues and adopts policies that highlight Egypt’s national interests. It is in this period that Egypt pushes the recognition of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation as a legitimate representative of the Palestinians. In the fifth period (1979 until the removal of Mobarek from the presidency in 2011), Cairo approaches the Palestinian–Israeli issues as cold peace with Israel and impolicy in general (p. 25). Egypt’s active stance in the region decreases considerably and the Palestinian–Israeli issue is left frozen for the future. Much of this depolarising course of action in Egypt’s international affairs parallels Egypt’s socio-economic problems within its borders and the pressures that come from international actors such as the US.

The second question Ozkan asks is why/how Egypt lost its regional influence and what Egypt should do to come back to the Middle East as a regional actor. To answer this question, the author argues that there is a lack of intellectual leadership, which constitutes one of the most important factors behind Egypt’s loss of leadership in the Palestinian–Israeli issues in particular, and Middle Eastern affairs in general. He notes that Egypt as a pivotal middle power in the Middle East has always possessed the possibility of influencing other Arab nations, and thus has the potential to contribute to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict which has been ranked as the most important obstacle in the peace-making process in the region. Therefore, a significant part of the book is spent explaining what went wrong to cause Egypt to lose its active leadership in the Arab affairs and what can be done to bring Egypt back to the Middle East. Ozkan argues:
process presumably could also be helpful in efforts to bring peace and security to the region. Whether the revolution will create a new formulation or not, it will be the key defining factor in the future of Egypt’s foreign policy in post-Mobarek era. (p. 117)

The author furthers his argument by asking what the ‘new’ Egyptian foreign policy will look like after the Tahrir revolution. Briefly, Ozkan draws the reader’s attention to two key points. One is that Cairo’s historical dilemma is in need of creating a balance among its triple identities (Arab, African and Mediterranean). The second is that Egypt, as a pivotal middle power in the Middle East, needs to resituate its position in the region, and re-coordinate its foreign policies regarding peace and security.

Even though the author makes the point that to understand the Tahrir revolution one first needs to understand the socio-political structures of pre-Tahrir Egypt, he falls short of revealing how these socio-political conditions led to the Tahrir moment in everyday Egypt.

Another shortcoming of the book, related to the first point, is its failure to engage in in-depth analysis of some of the key issues in the region and specifically in Egypt. Instead, the author attempts to cover broad subject matter in a limited space. The limited space puts constraints on the author to delve into some of the vital issues that need to be discussed in order to provide a better picture. Egypt’s foreign policy regarding the Palestinian–Israeli issues requires much more critical and in-depth investigation to include much of the state’s cultural, economic and social structures in the (re)forming and performing of international politics. The book also talks little about Egypt’s everyday socio-economic dynamics which can sometimes greatly influence the state’s actions and practising of its domestic and foreign policies.

However, despite its shortcomings, this book with its richness in theoretical and historical background about Egypt’s foreign policy (re)formation that is utterly attached to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict offers important insights to understanding current developments in the Middle East and in Egypt particularly.

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Rukmani Gupta*

India’s rise as a regional and global power could potentially alter the geopolitical landscape of the Asia-Pacific. With its economic growth and concomitant investments in military modernisation, many see India as evolving into a strategic pole in Asia. David Brewster in this volume sets out to examine ‘the consequences of India’s rise on the Asia Pacific strategic order’ (p. ix) and asks whether India will indeed join the ranks of major powers in the coming years.

Clearly then, Brewster begins with the assumption that India is not currently a major power in the region. That this stance is at variance with the belief prevalent