



# Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak

*Tarek Osman*

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## **Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak** Tarek Osman

Famous until the 1950s for its religious pluralism and extraordinary cultural heritage, Egypt is now seen as an increasingly repressive and divided land, home of the Muslim Brotherhood and an opaque regime headed by the aging President Mubarak.

In this immensely readable and thoroughly researched book, Tarek Osman explores what has happened to the biggest Arab nation since President Nasser took control of the country in 1954. He examines Egypt's central role in the development of the two crucial movements of the period, Arab nationalism and radical Islam; the increasingly contentious relationship between Muslims and Christians; and perhaps most important of all, the rift between the cosmopolitan elite and the mass of the undereducated and underemployed population, more than half of whom are aged under thirty. This is an essential guide to one of the Middle East's most important but least understood states.

## **Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak Details**

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# **From Reader Review Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak for online ebook**

## **Lucy says**

This is what I felt about AUC leaving Tahrir:

"The retreat from city centres to peripheral areas is also part of a wider change in Egyptians' relationship with their land. Egypt's urban constellations (mainly Cairo and Alexandria, but also Al-Mahala, Tanta, Al-Zakazeek and Asyut) and their surrounding areas are in constant flux with both population growth and internal migration (mainly from Al-Sayeed and the remote parts of the Delta--now around 800,000 annually). Egyptians were increasingly condensed in the centres as well as fragmented at the peripheries. Between the 1960s and the 2000s, Cairo grew from 6 million inhabitants to more than 15 million. The city's density, at more than 1,000 individuals per square kilometre, is among the highest in the world, and Alexandria is not far behind. The exuberance, energy and waves of creativity that characterized Cairo and Alexandria throughout the twentieth century were giving way to suffocating crowdedness, domineering compactness and stifling closeness. At the same time, the rich and the middle class were deserting the city centres and the old neighbourhoods for new suburbs, opting for gated communities on the outskirts, detached not only from the over-crowding and the increasingly ailing infrastructure, but also from the historic neighbourhoods and quarters that have witnessed and shaped Egyptians' interaction with their physical space throughout decades (and at times centuries).

"Cairo's centre, Zamalek, Garden City and Maadi were increasingly shadows of their former selves. New boutiques, restaurants and shopping centres continue to open up, but the city's centre of gravity has moved to the Sixth of October, Palm Hills, City Views, Allegria, the Fifth Settlement, Al-Obour and Al-Shorouk--new rich, immaculate and spacious communities, but lacking Cairo's and Alexandria's long and rich touches (and scars) of history.

"As a result, for the first time in Egypt's history many people live, work and socialize far from the city centre, leaving its landmarks--the centuries-old mosques and churches, the baroque buildings and palaces of Ismael Pasha, the Corniche's boulevards, the busy streets of Adly, Embaba and Shoubra--neglected. Egyptians' attachment to their physical heritage is diminishing" (200-1).

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## **Kristen says**

I read this for a class and it was just okay. Informative, but a little dry for my tastes.

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## **Frank Kelly says**

Quite helpful to understanding how we have gotten to where we are today in Egypt.

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## **Bob Uva says**

After reading about the activists who used Facebook and then researched non-violent protesting techniques to protest the behavior of the authoritarian Mubarak regime, I wanted to understand how such an autocrat,

entrenched in power and with the support of the military, could with apparent ease be forced to resign. I reviewed reader comments on a few books and chose this one by an Egyptian author.

Osman provides a brief historical survey of the nation but then concentrates on the 20th century developments, from their liberal experiment in the 20s through 40s to the 1952 revolution and the establishment of Nasser as a personification of the state, to the failed wars with Israel and the al-infatih movement over the latter part of the century. I was impressed with the author's ability to relate economics, politics and culture so that instead of reading as a traditional historical narrative of Egyptian governments (called 'projects', in translation, by the author), the book reveals how Egyptian writers and culture were changing.

I did not gain a lot of understanding of why Mubarak resigned, partly because the book was written, and then published, before the 2011 Arab Spring. But I do have a better understanding of the power structures in Egyptian society, of how Egyptians went from a predominantly Christian to a predominantly Muslim people, and of the ordinary Egyptian's suffering.

If you are looking for a relatively short study of Egypt in the 20th century with some insight into where the country could be headed in our century, I would strongly recommend this book.

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### **Daniel Simmons says**

For a macro-view snapshot of pre-Arab Spring Egypt, you could do worse. Given what happened in the Arab Spring and its aftermath, I was hoping for more in this book on the role of the military. To be fair to the author, he devotes some of his concluding chapter to that subject, but it still feels like there's a gaping hole in the otherwise admirable collection of themes he addresses: Islamism, the youth/age imbalance, the contrast in leadership styles between Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak, etc.

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### **Hamzah Shokeir says**

The nature of Egypt is complex, as I have gathered from this text. Tarek Osman's style of wiring doesn't help make it any simpler. Nonetheless it is one of the few texts that narrate the history of modern Egypt in plenty of depth.

The book divides Egypt in the pre-modern era, Nasser and Arab nationalism, the islamists, the rise of liberal capitalism, Egyptian christians (very important), Mubarak's years and young Egyptians.

It is a work i'll have to reread as it is rather dense in detail. I recommend it to the individual who is heavily interested in Egypt's recent history, its economic evolution and its possible future. For another reason aside from being heavily interested and curious about modern political Egypt; this book may be difficult to finish.

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### **Frank Kelly says**

The Arab Spring has brought new attention to Egypt as it leads the region in a popular revolt against corruption and repression. If there was one thing many of us realized as we sat glued to our televisions and

computer screens watching the protests and rallies is that we really do not understand modern Egypt. If you want to get an excellent in-depth political view of this is fascinating country, then this is the book to read. Obviously written before the uprising, it explains clearly what Nasser created and how, instead of empowering the peoples of Egypt, the country slid deeper into a stranglehold of nepotism and corruption. It also explains Egypt's foreign policy and her critical role in maintaining peace in the region. Well worth the read.

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### **LucknGrace says**

Osman's history of Egypt told me that Nassar was the best, most fair and forward-looking leader, even if he did favor the Soviets in order to finance the great Aswan dam. After Nassar's death, Islamic powers began to smother innovation and forcing Christians out of the country. The book also gave me things to think about when considering America's role in the Middle East. For instance, America helped revolutionaries push Mubarak (a dictator who should have left power long ago) out of office knowing there is a good chance the Muslim Brotherhood might seize power. The MB hates Christians and America. Should we be driving off dictators who have been loyal to America when it may jeopardize the lives and future of America and the West? Yes, we do want women everywhere to be educated and treated with respect, but should the welfare of foreign women supersede the protection of our own homeland from terrorism and the Islamic purpose of forcing the world into an Islamic caliphate and Sharia law? I hope our diplomats are looking at these questions from all sides and placing priority on America's needs (although at times we have been pushy for our own ends).

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### **Nate says**

Given the events that have been unfolding in the Middle East this Spring, this is a must read. The author gives a detailed and very useful account of Egyptian society and politics from its independence from the Ottomans, through the Monarchy, up to Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak. This book was published in 2010. As a result, the author, a Cairene Egyptian, speaks of the situations right up to the recent revolution with personal clarity and insight.

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### **Diane says**

Written shortly before the uprisings that would drive Mubarak from office, this history of modern Egypt covers the 19th century to the present, with a focus on Egypt's future prospects. The author is a better thinker than a writer, and the writing style is a bit elementary, but the book is a good introduction to modern Egypt. I thought the sections on Egypt's Christians and Egyptian young people were especially strong. The author seeks to highlight positive developments in Egypt (such as the growth of entrepreneurship among young Egyptians), but is also honest about the many challenges facing the country. Interestingly, he discusses the growing influence of Salafists in Egyptian society, something that I thought was not widely known at the time of his writing.

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## **Michael says**

Why I didn't like this book: 1) It depicts Egyptian Christians in a very negative perspective, as money-hoarders and pure capitalists. He explains the dogmatic difference between Coptic Orthodox Christians and Catholics in error - describes Copts as monophysites and then goes on to explain what monophysitism is and gets that wrong, too! 2) Osman starts his discussion of the attacks on Christians by militant Islamic groups with a sort of justification for the attacks, namely a 2005 play that villagers found insulting to Islam - this, of course, is despite the fact that attacks preceded the play by decades. 3) He is very encouraging of a Muslim Brotherhood state in light of the revolution, and gives them credit for the success of the revolution in providing "critical mass" to the protests.

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## **Sheila says**

This is good background reading when trying to understand events unfolding in Egypt. It is a startling fact that 75 percent of Egypt's population is under the age of 35. The stark divide between rich and poor adds fuel to the fires of discontent in this young population. Tracking events in Tahrir Square made me want to explore Egypt's recent history, and this book was a good start for me. Looking at other reviews in the press, it is a highly regarded viewpoint and sheds light on the twists and turns in Egypt's political, social, religious, and economic arenas.

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## **Roberta (Bobbie) says**

The brink of what? Mubarak's death. Will Egypt become more closely associated with political Islam or with the liberal capitalism of the current regime which has lost touch with the people? Will Gamal Mubarak reach for the presidency despite his aloofness from the populace? How will the overwhelmingly young Egyptian population respond to Mubarak's death?

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## **Samuel Rogers says**

This book was very difficult to comprehend and its claim to be a good introductory book to Egyptian politics is not exactly accurate. The book references various events which the lay person doesn't have knowledge of and uses very few sources to back up its claims. There were moments where the author displayed genuine insight, but they were few and far between.

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## **Marie says**

A few interesting tidbits, particularly on Gamal Nasser, a recent historical figure on par with Lincoln or

Martin Luther King Jr. in terms of his impact on society, and one not many Americans may be familiar with. I'd pick up another book that focused on Nasser.

At 245 pages (minus footnotes), this should be a sleek and compact coverage of Egypt's recent history. Instead, it felt like an overstuffed "The Economist" article. The author writes about how Cairo and Alexandria now have "suffocating crowdedness, domineering compactness and stifling closeness." (p. 200) So...they're crowded. He goes on for several pages to explain the highly-familiar topics of urban crowding, flight to the suburbs, and ghettos. The author also summarizes the plots to several Egyptian movies, which, while diverting, seemed odd and somewhat off-topic.

The book was published before the recent demonstrations in Egypt that led to Mubarak's fall, so that isn't covered. I just wish I could have gotten a better sense of the underlying currents that led up to that moment. Unfortunately, the relevant information is so buried under academic jargon that I walked away not knowing much more about Egypt than I had before. On the bright side, this made me grateful that I'm no longer forced to read books in the weird world of academia, where obfuscation is a desirable trait.

I'd recommend "The Economist" for those interested in learning more about recent events in Egypt. Also, "Who Hates Whom" by Bob Harris gives a quick historical overview of major world conflicts in a breezy style.

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