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January 31, 2011

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: Intel on Egypt

I have had conversations today with Tyler Drumheller and Pat Lang on the Egyptian crisis. Drumheller has been in close contact with high level European intelligence officials with direct sources on the ground in Egypt. Lang is an old friend of Omar Suleiman. Below are notes on their information, followed by options based on our conversations:

1. The situations in Alexandria and Suez are exponentially worse than in Cairo—no police, no government, no magistrates, more violence, more deaths. The military wants to maintain itself and that means Mubarak will have to go. He wants to hold on for a couple of weeks so he doesn't have to flee.
2. Last fall Suleiman fell out of favor Mubarak for an unknown reason, probably because of Gamal's ambition. Suleiman has been much abused and tormented by Mubarak. He has been promised the VP job for 15 years, but never got it because Mubarak was afraid he would succeed him instead of Gamal. It was supposedly planned that Suleiman was to be in place while Gamal was trained, but it never happened. Suleiman is not popular with rest of military. He's from intelligence, not the army. He's not disliked, but the military also knows he's unacceptable to the people now.
3. The military knows it must reach an accommodation with the Muslim Brotherhood and is reaching out to the MB. Most of radical MB leaders are imprisoned; the military is talking to moderates. There's no Khomeini or Nasrallah out there. The problem is not the MB. The problem is the general level of religiosity among the lower classes that lack jobs.
4. The military wants a general as president and a civilian, someone like ElBaradei, as PM, but probably not EB, who has no political base, though his standing is growing.
5. The army has control of the situation, at least for now. This is not a bunch of young people playing with social media as depicted in the US press. The situation, however, has potential to go either way. But suppressing the crowds would mean a bloodbath, unacceptable to the military. The army hates the police. In 1985, the army fought the police in the streets. The police are disappearing or in some places completely gone. The police are burning their uniforms.
6. The military knows Mubarak must go. But when? If he holds on too long the situation will spin out of control. Another week may be too long. The general staff has to look Mubarak in the eye and tell him to go. Have they done it? Can they? They know he can't stay, but will they force him to leave?
7. The best case scenario would be a transition to elections with Suleiman as an interim head of state. But even that may be dicey at this point. Every day Mubarak stays the potential for disaster looms greater.
8. After some poor initial positioning, the US government has it right with your statements