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The New Contours of Gaza

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[Malou Innocent](#)^[2]



Following the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, Egypt's military council assumed power and promised to abide by all of the country's prior international commitments. However, the council's recent decision to [open](#)^[3] Egypt's Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip is not incomprehensible. If anything, it was unavoidable.

Although scarcely mentioned in Washington, the reality of the region is that most Egyptians resolutely opposed Mubarak and his coterie on important regional questions, particularly the Egyptian leadership's subordination to American will on Gaza. When [Hamas](#)^[4], a violent outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood that calls for the destruction of Israel, won the Palestinian elections in 2006 and further consolidated its power in 2007, Egyptian and Israeli leaders had a shared interest in diplomatically and economically isolating the group. Many Egyptians, on the other hand, viewed the action as a form of collective punishment, and came to feel that they bore considerable responsibility for the suffering of the Palestinian people. For Egyptians, such

a meaningful, value-laden, identity-based policy resonates far more than the receipt of American aid money.

Just ask Western-oriented Egyptian [Dr. Mohamed El Baradei](#) [5], Nobel laureate and former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency. He [described](#) [6] Egypt's participation in the Gaza siege as "a brand of shame on the forehead of every Arab, every Egyptian and every human being." Unsurprisingly, he [said](#) [7] the blockade should be lifted.

Or take [Ayman Nour](#) [8], the secular and liberal-minded opposition figure imprisoned after having the temerity to run for president against Mubarak in 2005. Earlier this year, he [said](#) [9] that the 1978 Camp David Accords were "finished," and that "Egypt has to at least conduct negotiations over conditions of the agreement."

Last, but certainly not least, is Arab League Chief Amr Mousa. He is quite popular in Egypt for his [scathing criticisms](#) [10] of Israel and the United States. However, in a stunning example of how principle does not always translate into policy, Mousa recently [said](#) [11]: "We cannot rebuild Egypt...while adopting an adventurous foreign policy."

Well, there you go.

While anything can happen, it seems highly unlikely that a more pluralistic Egypt would seek to embark on a foolish military adventure against Israel. What is clear, however, is that any future government responsive to the demands of its people will dramatically reorient or completely repudiate Mubarak's policies toward Palestine.

As scholar Robert L. Tignor [observes](#) [12], "[The Egyptian-Israeli relationship] has suffered whenever the Israelis repressed Palestinian dissidents in Gaza and the West Bank." Today, with Mubarak gone, it seems that Egyptian-Israeli relations will suffer. One can only hope that in this case, only slightly.

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