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Egyptians call for Sharia Law, Islamic caliphate

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Tens, and perhaps hundreds of thousands of Egyptians poured into Cairo's now-famed Tahrir Square on Friday to demand their nation become subject to Sharia Law and form the cornerstone for a new Islamic caliphate.



The unplanned demonstration erupted following Friday prayers at mosques around the Egyptian capital.

The demonstrators, who were led by the increasingly powerful Muslim Brotherhood, demanded that Egypt's interim military regime give way to an intolerant Islamic dictatorship.

Various news media reported the demonstrators shouting and holding up signs reading: "Egypt will return to Sharia Law!", "Liberals and secularists are the enemies of Allah!", and "The solution is Islam!"

When Egyptians ousted former dictator Hosni Mubarak in February, the international media made much of how conservative Muslims, Coptic Christians and Egyptian secularists worked together for the common goal of democratic freedom.

The prevailing assumption was that Egypt would serve as a model of how a diverse, but tolerant Middle East society could throw off the shackles of dictatorial oppression and build something better.

But Egyptian commentators are now saying that what is happening in their country more closely resembles the Iranian revolution.

In 1979, a broad coalition of Iranians overthrew the dictatorial regime of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. The shah was briefly replaced by a secular, democratic government. But Islamists quickly hijacked the revolution, and Iran today is ruled by a religious council and is subject to the strictest interpretation of Sharia Law.

What is happening in Egypt now "is a lot like Iran, and it's only going to get worse," Saeed Rahnema, a pro-democracy demonstrator in Iran in the late 1970s and now a professor at York University in Toronto, told Canada's *The Globe and Mail*.

Egypt's one hope at this point is that the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist movement currently lacks a charismatic leader like the Iranians had in Ayatollah Khomeini.

But such a figure can rise quickly in this region. And even if he does not, the fear that the Islamists are sowing in their fellow Egyptians is all but guaranteeing that even a democratically elected Egyptian government will be dominated by Muslim fundamentalists.

Meanwhile, tensions between Israel and post-revolution Egypt are again rising after Muslim gunmen bombed the Sinai natural gas pipeline on Saturday, the fifth such attack since Mubarak's ouster.

The pipeline had already been turned off while work was being done to repair damage from the previous bombing earlier in the month. Israel receives about 40 percent of its natural gas from that pipeline, and having it out of order is setting the stage for an energy cost crisis in the Jewish state.

The latest pipeline attack has reignited the debate over whether or not Israel should continue to purchase natural gas from Egypt, considering that the Jewish state has recently discovered its own massive reserves.

Israel buys natural gas from Egypt as part of the Camp David Accords that brought peace between the two nations. But Israeli energy experts say it can no longer be seen as a reliable source of energy.

Israel's own offshore gas reserves are actually larger than Egypt's, and could easily supply the nation's needs. But making such a switch is certain to put the kind of economic pressure on Egypt that could lead to an outbreak of hostilities.

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