

THE YOUTH-DRIVEN (AND FACEBOOK ENABLED) REVOLUTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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My soul, my life, my Egypt

—written on the forehead of a sleeping child in Cairo's Tahrir Square

*Papa and I are here for you today. We have not known freedom,
But we want to make sure that you will.*

—Parents speaking to their 7-months-old child in Tahrir Square

We either live together, or we die together.

—Mohamed El-Sawy, a Muslim protecting a Coptic Church

*In this uprising the Muslim Brotherhood is almost invisible,
but not in America and Europe, which fear them as the bogeyman.*

—Hisham Kaseem, newspaper editor and human rights activist

*You don't have the Brotherhood protesting here in Alexandria.
You have normal people protesting about their problems.*

—Hamid Said, 29, Nasar Center for Human Rights

We need to do what they're doing in Egypt.

—a Tea Party activist

Egypt's new Vice President, Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister have praised the young people in Cairo's Tahrir Square for taking the country in a new direction. (As Mubarak insiders, many may doubt their sincerity.) They are now asking that the protesters to go home, but as 23-year-old architect Ahmed Mohammed says: "We can negotiate with Vice President Omar Sulieman, but first President Hosni Mubarak has to leave." In a rambling, nearly incoherent speech in the late evening of February 10, Mubarak did not resign but apparently relinquished all power to Sulieman.

The protest time and location—Liberation Square in English—is filled with political symbolism. It represents the day in which Egyptian nationalists, supported by

the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., rose up against the British and King Farouk on January 25, 1952. Mubarak made it a national holiday, and using Facebook and other social media, the organizers chose that day to demand the rights promised them by General Gamal Nasser in 1952.

The wave of protests across the Middle East began in Tunisia, where on December 17 a young fruit seller was roughed up by police for not having a business license. Fed up with government repression and no job prospects with his university degree, he immolated himself. The popular reaction was so swift and strong that President Zine ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia after 23 days.

Young people and their supporters are demanding their rights in Yemen, Jordan, and even Syria. (Yemenis continue to gather in their own Tahrir Square in Sanaa.) Syria is known, just as Egypt was in the immediate past, for brutal suppression of any dissent, but the Jordanian and Yemeni governments have acted quickly to meet demands for more open societies. Egyptian security forces initially suppressed the demonstrators killing over 300, but they are now guarding the entrances to Liberation Square. The demonstrators locked arms to prevent any more tanks from entering the square, and some are spending their nights under these American-supplied weapons.

The pro-democracy activists have been joined by leading politicians, university administrators, military officers, and journalists. Mohamed Rafah Tahtawy resigned his administrative post at Al-Azhar University and headed for Tahrir Square. In 2001 Gen. Amre Moussa was appointed by Mubarak to become the President of the Arab League. He has now joined the protesters and has offered himself as a candidate to replace Mubarak. Also at the square was retired army general Osman Ibrahim, who said, according to the *Washington Post*: "I saw real Egyptians out there. It's not what we've been told by the Egyptian propaganda machine. These people are peaceful."

Ann Coulter, typical of pundits on the right, is dead wrong when she claims that there are no women present in the square. Many women in secular and traditional dress are among the protesters. CNN video showed one young woman, in a tight sweater and stylish headscarf, leading the chants.

Shahira Amin, a senior correspondent for Nile TV for 22 years and now writing for Bloomberg News, quit her job in disgust and has now joined the protesters. Wearing no headscarf she told CNN that she felt guilty for always censoring herself, and that she can now take some credit for the fact that the new prime minister Amed Shafiq has called for the end of press censorship.

Egyptian journalist Maram Mazen, also without headscarf and on contract for Bloomberg News, was attacked by about 40 Mubarak supporters, many of whom have turned out to be plain-clothed policemen or paid ruffians. Mazen's car was damaged beyond repair, her male colleagues were beaten, and she was pulled by the hair. Soldiers stood by passively, but her crew finally got begrudging help from a policeman, who warned her that she "will be lynched" by these thugs.

Young demonstrator Khalid Abdul Rahman was leading injured Mubarak supporters to a makeshift clinic. His reason for helping was that “they are Egyptians just like we are. But someone’s telling them that we’re not Egyptians.” Obviously not all Egyptians think the demonstrators are patriots.

Mohamed Elbaradei, former head of the International Atomic Energy Association and Nobel Peace Prize winner, has joined in as well. Whereas Amre Moussa was greeted with cheers in the square, Elbaradei was widely ignored when he tried to speak. He is perceived as an outsider and one who has not yet “paid his dues” to lead the Egyptian people.

The demonstrators have given no indication that they are religiously motivated. No clerics are leading the protests in Tunisia, Jordan, Syria, and Yemen protesters either. (The words “jihad” was shouted in Tahrir Square only as a call for defense from attack by armed pro-Mubarak gangs.) A Tunisian cleric has returned from exile, but he has promised that he will not lead an Iranian-style Islamic revolution.

The Egyptian leader of the Salafists, the most extreme Muslims, announced that they would not be participating in the protests, and the liberal Sufi community decided to stay away from Tahrir Square especially after pro-Mubarak forces attacked the peaceful demonstrators. Both groups said that their place was in their mosques and not in the streets.

In Tahrir Square Christian Copts have been seen guarding the thousands of Muslims who make themselves vulnerable by prostrating themselves five times a day. Christians and members of the Muslim Brotherhood—distinctive with their closely cropped hair—stood shoulder-to-shoulder chanting slogans.

Moving through Liberation Square, Shihira Amin saw “a Coptic priest and a Muslim sheikh standing side-by-side during a mass for the Martyrs of the Revolution. Fingers entwined in a show of interfaith solidarity, they chanted ‘We are one.’”

Christians and Muslims hold up each other’s scriptures and have adopted the Cross and the Crescent as their symbol. Reminiscent of the prophet Isaiah’s turning “swords to ploughshares,” the stones that were previously hurled at pro-Mubarak ruffians are now being made into street art, including a Christian cross intersecting a Muslim crescent.

Among the organizers of the protests is Sally Moore, a 32-year-old Irish-Egyptian Christian, who told a *New York Times* reporter: “I like the Brotherhood most, and they like me. Let them have a political party just like everyone else — they will not win more than 10 percent.” Socialist and Communist university students have joined forces with the Brotherhood to demand their civil rights.

Leading cultural, political, and religious leaders have also joined together to protect Christian churches from attack. They are forming human shields to prevent outrages such as the suicide bombing at Saints Church in Alexandria on New Year's Day, which killed 25 people and wounded over a hundred (Muslims included). The Muslim Brotherhood immediately called for the protection of all Christian churches. "We either live together, or we die together," said Mohamed El-Sawy, a Muslim arts tycoon. Two of Mubarak sons are also part of the Muslim church guard.

America's conservatives are split on whom to support. Potential presidential candidates Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney charge that Obama has not done enough to move Mubarak out. As a breathless Tea Party activist declared: "We need to do what they're doing in Egypt."

Sarah Palin, Mike Huckabee, John Boehner, and Dick Cheney take an opposite view. Cheney calls Mubarak a "good friend and ally"; Boehner wants him to stay on as president; Huckabee agrees and is worried about Israel's security; and all of them warn about a Muslim Brotherhood take-over.

All of these folks support, however, the Shia-led Iraqi government whose leaders hug and kiss delegates from our enemy Iran. They also conveniently ignore the fact that Mubarak ruled over a brutal police state that was very willing to serve as a Bush administration rendition site for the torture of our prisoners from Afghanistan.

After militant beginnings in the 1930s and 40s, the Muslim Brotherhood now serves primarily as a nonviolent social welfare organization. Brotherhood doctors form the core of the medical care being provided to the injured in the square. Their membership is about 100,000 in a country of 82 million, and political observers estimate that they would draw between 20-30 percent of the votes in an election. They are the best-organized political party, primarily because while the government could not shut down mosques, it could easily shut secular party offices.

Running as independents in the 2005 election, the Brotherhood won 88 seats in the 440-seat Parliament. (Mubarak made sure that they received no seats in the rigged 2010 elections.) If they are interested in an Islamist state, why is the Brotherhood now supporting the worldly and secular Elbaradei as Mubarak's successor? One of their leaders, writing for the *New York Times*, said that they would not be participating in any presidential contest.

A 2006 University of Maryland survey found that 33 percent of Egyptians were sympathetic to Osama bin Laden, but only because he confronted the U.S. Only 7 percent supported his goal of establishing an Islamic State. A Pew Research Center poll of Egyptians found that 83 percent of the population would "never" or "rarely" think that suicide bombing of civilians is justified. The same University of Maryland poll gave the most shocking results for American views. When asked if attacks on civilians were justified, only 46 percent answered "never." When American Muslims were separated

out, 80 percent answered that they were never justified, about the same figure that Iranians gave in the same poll.

Since 1952 the Brotherhood has foresworn all violence, and for decades Al Qaeda has criticized them unmercifully for giving up worldwide jihad and the concept of a universal caliphate. Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahri, Osama bin Laden's right-hand man who was once a member, condemns the Brotherhood as "falsely affiliated with Islam." He says that they have forgotten about the rule of Shariah, and they welcome "Crusaders in your country and acknowledge the existence of the Jews who are fully armed with nuclear weapons." The Brotherhood has condemned Al Qaeda's attacks on civilians and foreign tourists. Glenn Beck's claim that the protestors are Bolsheviks and that the Brotherhood is a terrorist organization is, not surprisingly, a grotesque distortion.

If you go to the Brotherhood's website you will find that they demand the release of all political prisoners; a full investigation of corruption on the part of government officials; freedom of the press and assembly; and far less power for the presidency. There is no mention of Sharia law or the return of the Caliphate. *The Economic Times* reports that "reformers within the movement have said they would like to see a civil state guided by Islamic mores."

In a 2008 manifesto the Brotherhood did call for the formation of a Council of Islamic Scholars, but its role would be advisory only. Unlike the Shias, the Sunni Egyptians do not have any clerical hierarchy, so no one speaks for all Sunnis. Open discussion about the 2008 manifesto showed the Brotherhood was not a monolith and, for example, there was disagreement about the proposal that women or Copts would not be supported for elected office.

The U.S. allows political parties allied with Christian fundamentalists, so why cannot we allow the participation of religious conservatives in other countries? There are at least 1,000 people in my own town of 22,000 who are led by a pastor who does not believe that women should vote, and that all Biblical laws should be enforced, including the execution or exile of homosexuals. (A member of this church was elected to the city council.) A recent poll showed that 9 percent of Americans believed that the Bible should be the law of the land, and many more want Muslims to leave the country. We do not bar these people from the political process because they believe in a Christian form of Sharia. We may all cringe when we hear the Brotherhood's chant of "Islam is the Solution," but I'm equally concerned about our politicians and military men claiming that "Jesus is the Answer" to our country's problems.

The take-over to be feared most is a military coup. As civilians were moved out, one half of Mubarak's new cabinet is now composed of military men. Army officers control 60 percent of the provinces, and they also run many of the large businesses. CNN's Fareed Zakaria is convinced that a military rule is a real and dangerous possibility.

After initial acts of violent suppression, the Egyptian military has shown great restraint, so there perhaps hope for a constructive role of the military. There are close ties

between America's top generals and their Egyptian counterparts. Colin Powell, for example, has been in touch with his friends in Cairo.

Several commentators believe that Egypt will follow the path taken by Indonesia. Moderate Muslims have always dominated in the two countries, and both have long histories of secular rule. The current Indonesian government has had good success in bringing jihadists to trial for the Bali bombing, and Egypt will now be challenged to use the rule of law, rather than torture, to keep its militants at bay. It looks as if the Egyptian military will bow to civilian rule just as the Indonesia army has done. The model of Turkey has also been proposed by Hugh Papes of the International Crisis Group. There a moderate Islamist party has had good economic success and ruled a secular state successfully this past decade.

Egypt may end up with a government that has the participation of Islamists who may moderate even more with the responsibility of governing. The new government may well be more supportive of the Palestinian cause and less friendly to Israel. (The Egyptian blockade of Gaza is morally indefensible.) The Egyptian military may well lose some of its aid from the U.S., but I view that as a something very positive. (Over \$60 billion over thirty was an obscene amount of money, especially when corrupt officials siphoned off a good deal of it. One million men under arms is also grotesquely excessive.) Less military aid may force the new government to keep its peace treaty with Israel. The Israelis and we will simply have to accept the decisions of freely elected Egyptians, who understandably will not tolerate any more outside interference in their affairs.

Finally, I have some personal advise to the brave young people in Liberation Square. As a former student leader in the anti-Vietnam War movement, I can detect a certain naiveté that we also held on our own barricades. Starting in 1965 we demanded the immediate withdrawal of American troops, but instead we were promised negotiations, which dragged on for years and our forces did not leave until 1975.

One of the groups now negotiating with Vice President Sulieman is called "January 25," the start date of the protests in Liberation Square and a national holiday. The people on the ground, however, say that this group does not represent them. If this is true, then they should elect their own representatives and demand a seat at the table. The full effect of their incredible revolution will be lost if they do not take part.

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