



Egypt's Problem of Leadership

Even the establishment leaders in the United States may not know what will result from the Egyptian protests. The American establishment — personified by the Council on Foreign Relations located at Pratt House in New York City — has never been reluctant to jettison one dictator it had favored when another, more stable dictator was waiting in the wings. The mere fact that the Obama administration and its State Department under Hillary Clinton has clung to the Mubarak regime long after it became apparent the Mubarak regime would not last the year may be an indication they don't have a comparable stooge waiting in the wings to take charge.

The Egyptian problem is one of leadership: Who or what will lead?

The most hopeful answer to that question is that no one man or group of men will lead, but that Egypt will be ruled by law that restrains the government. Although Egypt unfortunately has no cultural heritage of obtaining this goal, the protests have revealed some hopeful signs.

Part of the confusion is that there was no single cause of the Egyptian protests, unlike the Tunisian rebels who were largely spurred by a 30-year legacy of corruption that had been led by WikiLeaks revelations of U.S. diplomatic correspondence documenting that corruption. Egypt has had the same 30 years of corruption, and [WikiLeaks has released some documentation](#) of that corruption. But Egyptians have also been providing their own documentation of police brutality in recent months. The June 2010 beating death of [Khaled Said](#) went viral on the Internet. Said was a blogger who was beaten to death by Egyptian police because he had video documentation of corrupt police splitting up the spoils of a drug bust. Other beatings — including some bound prisoners being sodomized by police with a nightstick — have also gone viral. And Egyptian protesters were definitely encouraged by the success of the Tunisian protests.

Frequent attempts by Western media to find a single "leader" among the mostly youthful protesters have failed to produce one. "This is the revolution of the youth of the Internet, which became the revolution of the youth of Egypt, then the revolution of Egypt itself," Google marketing executive for the Middle East and North Africa Wael Ghonim [told the press](#) after suffering more than a week of imprisonment at the hands of Egyptian police. Some in the media have tried to paint him as the leader, but Ghonim has deferred. "I'm not a hero, I slept for 12 days," Ghonim stated after being released from police captivity. "The heroes, they're the ones who were in the street, who took part in the demonstrations, sacrificed their lives, were beaten, arrested and exposed to danger."

Another person cited as a "leader" of the protests has been [Asmaa Mahfouz](#). Noting that four Egyptians have set themselves on fire in protest of the Mubarak regime, Asmaa Mahfouz proclaimed in a Vlog posted online just before the onset of the protests: "People, have some shame!... I'm making this video



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on February 12, 2011

to give you one simple message. We want to go down to Tahrir square on January 25.... We'll go down and demand our rights, our fundamental human rights. I won't even talk about any political rights. We want our human rights and nothing else.... I will not set myself on fire! If the security forces want to set me on fire, let them come and do it! If you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25th. Whoever says women shouldn't go to protests because they will get beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on January 25th."

But Mahfouz's role in the protests — while inspirational — was not overwhelming. Her Blog only saw 100,000 hits, most of them after January 25. She may have inspired some to protest, but was not the primary organizer.

This lack of a single leader is actually a great strength in the Egyptian protest movement. On the other hand, the youth who dominated the rallies in Tahrir Square also don't have any cohesive agenda, other than to depose Mubarak. That's a weakness. It's also possibly an indication of youthful political naivety, which elites can exploit to try to impose a new dictator to replace the old one.

Unsavory forces are waiting in the wings to take charge. The Egyptian [Muslim Brotherhood](#) has been the primary opposition party for more than a generation. Officially banned for more than a generation, the Muslim Brotherhood has thrived as a large, genuine Islamic charitable organization within the mosques, and has significant support among the poor it has aided. The Muslim Brotherhood favors Shari'a Law, including a [ban on women serving as government chief executives](#), enshrining Islam as the official religion of Egypt, and separate Islamic courts. Though it condemned violence and terrorism more than a generation ago, as an officially banned opposition group it has had loose [ties](#) to a variety of unsavory groups such as the [Communist Party](#) over the years. On the other hand, the Muslim Brotherhood is neither a communist organization nor like the Taliban of Afghanistan. It rejects the idea of the Dhimmi, which relegates non-Muslims to second class citizenship and special "protection" taxation and would allow women to serve in legislatures. And the Muslim Brotherhood did not start these protests. Instead, backed them much later, which hurt the organization's credibility. Therefore, it's unlikely the Muslim Brotherhood's fairly strict Islamic views would win a majority in any genuinely free elections when the more cosmopolitan youth involved in the protests are allowed to vote. But of course, what kind of elections actually take place, and how free or controlled those elections would be, remain to be seen.

America's Founding Fathers knew that only a legislative branch and constitution that limits government can save a free people. But many Americans today increasingly look to electing a powerful leader as President who will save them from the threat of big government. Americans will soon have either a negative example from Egypt of how seeking a powerful executive branch "leader" to self-limit is a totalitarian conceit or a positive example of how a government chained down by a limited constitution can be the path to freedom.

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