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LISA ANDERSON

The Egyptian Uprising:
Opportunities and Challenges

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**The Egyptian Uprising:
Opportunities and Challenges**

November 7, 2011





Profile

Lisa Anderson is the President of the American University in Cairo (AUC). A specialist on politics in the Middle East and North Africa, Dr. Anderson served as the University's Provost from 2008 to 2010. As the Chief Academic Officer, she was responsible for shaping and implementing AUC's academic vision and building the size and quality of the faculty.

Prior to joining AUC in 2008, Dr. Anderson served as the James T. Shotwell Professor of International Relations at Columbia University and is the former Dean of the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia. She also served as the Chair of the Political Science Department at the university and as the Director of Columbia's Middle East Institute. Before joining Columbia, she was Assistant Professor of Government and Social Studies at Harvard University.

A past President of the Middle East Studies Association and Chair of the Board of the Social Science Research Council, Anderson is also a former member of the Council of the American Political Science Association and served on the board of the Carnegie Council on Ethics in International Affairs. She is member emerita of the board of Human Rights Watch, where she served as co-chair of Human Rights Watch/Middle East, co-chair of the International Advisory Board of the Von Humbolt Foundation and member of the International Advisory Council of the World Congress for Middle East Studies. She is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Dr. Anderson is the author of *Pursuing Truth, Exercising Power: Social Science and Public Policy in the Twenty-first Century* (Columbia University Press, 2003), *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980* (Princeton University Press, 1986), editor of *Transitions to Democracy* (Columbia University Press, 1999) and co-editor of *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (Columbia University Press, 1991).

Dr. Anderson holds a B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College and an M.A. in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Columbia University in 1981, where she also received a certificate from the Middle East Institute. She was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws from Monmouth University in 2002.





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Lecture

Lisa Anderson, the American University in Cairo, Egypt

I am going to talk about the Egyptian uprising, but I want to put it in a regional context to some extent, and even, periodically, in a global context. It is very hard to think about what actually happened, and what kinds of interpretations we will place on it, what the cause was, and the effects will be of this uprising, in isolation.

Clearly there was a temporal context — a lot of things converged at the same time in the beginning of 2011 — and a geographic context: this is part of what is often called the ‘Arab Spring.’ So I’d like to talk in general about the time and place in which Egypt has seen the changes it’s seen and then specifically about Egypt as well. Egypt is of course by far the largest, and historically the most important country in the Arab world. Something between a quarter and a third of all Arabs live in Egypt. It has long felt — and most of

the region has felt — that it should be the most important country and one of the complaints about the Mubarak regime was that its relative importance in Arab politics had begun to decline. Egypt’s regional role is important to Egypt and to the region.

The Regional Context

Starting in mid-December of last year, when the Tunisian vegetable vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in a display of hopeless frustration at government harassment, almost every country in the Arab world saw protests. It is important to remember that, because we tend to focus on the countries where the protests continued and particularly where they saw regime change. But, in fact, virtually everywhere in the region there were protests. His act itself, the self-immolation, was copied in Algeria, Jordan, and Egypt. Peaceful demonstrations, marches, and rallies starting with protests against corruption, police brutality, and high food prices escalated to calls for change in policies in Saudi Arabia, Oman, the governments of Jordan, Morocco, and Bahrain, and ultimately regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria — virtually no country, in other words, was exempt and no government unscathed.

By mid-June, the governments of Algeria and Saudi Arabia had announced major infusions of money, including across-the-board wage increases. The cabinets in Jordan and Morocco had been

sacked, the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia had fallen, Libya had slid into what appeared to be civil war, Yemen was in limbo as the evacuation of the president for medical treatment to Saudi Arabia had just taken place, and Syria was confronting a brutal crackdown by its government. Now, some months later, Syria is confronting increasing violence and the Libyan regime has fallen and Gaddafi has been killed. The process continues — it continues both in the countries where we saw a change of regime and in the countries where we have not.

The process continues — it continues both in the countries where we saw a change of regime and in the countries where we have not.

Regional Commonalities: Information, Authority, Rights, and Responsibilities

There are certainly common themes across all of these changes. I'd like to highlight a few of them and then talk about the differences in the countries themselves. Clearly, one of the things that everyone has remarked on is the extent to which the new information and communication technologies, especially the social media, were important in fuelling and disseminating the protests. In obvious ways, they permitted relatively unimpeded access to information — in a context in which information is usually quite impeded — about the way people live elsewhere in the world. They also permitted

organization and communication among and across protestors, within and beyond the borders of each country. Clearly there was a contagion effect in the region that was partly facilitated by the availability of information that would not have been as easily available even ten years ago.

Perhaps more suddenly, there have been changes in authority relations in the region. I want to accent this because it is important — people haven't appreciated it enough and it is global. We are seeing in the Arab world something that is a global phenomenon, perhaps first evident there, but increasingly as we are beginning to see in the Occupy Wall Street protests in the United States and their echoes in Europe and elsewhere. We are seeing something that will continue for some time now.

These technologies were not only important in and of themselves in their capacity to provide and disseminate information, but they empowered a generation who had become accustomed early in their lives to be more tech-savvy and hence, in modest but significant ways, more knowledgeable and authoritative than their parents. The young people of the Arab world are not only a large proportion of the population as you know — after all, this is the youth bulge in the Arab world — but their experience of growing up is qualitatively different from that of their parents. Again, this

We are seeing in the Arab world
something that is a global phenomenon.



is true virtually everywhere in the world. This generational cohort taught themselves and then their parents and teachers to use these technologies, and in doing so, assumed a kind of a responsibility for themselves and their families that their parents had not borne at the same age.

Before the development of mobile telephony, the inadequacy of the telephone network was a regular staple of fabled Egyptian humor. At the turn of the millennium, there were a million mobile phones in Egypt. By 2010, in a country of about eighty-five million, there were seventy million mobile phones. Mobile telephony has completely transformed Egypt — how people understand their daily lives, how they communicate with each other on just simple familial issues. It had nothing to do with politics; it has changed the way Egypt works. And it is, of course, the youth of the country who grew up with this technology and who taught their parents how it worked. That's a critical feature of all of this. Their impatience and frustration at being unable to deploy the information they accessed, the knowledge they acquired, and the responsibility they shouldered, goes a long way to explain the millions of young people who continue to militate for more open, transparent, and accountable government.

And there is a funny little story about this in Egypt, particularly

during the protest in Tahrir Square. The Egyptian government made what turned out to be the crucial mistake of suspending the mobile phone and internet systems in the country for well over four days, thinking that that would prevent precisely this kind of communication. Well, in some ways it did, but by then things had gotten too far along and people had already made arrangements for the rumored suspension, including we at AUC, who had collected all the landline numbers of the senior administration and arranged meetings that were to convene automatically in the event that communications were cut.

Mobile telephony has completely transformed Egypt ... it has changed the way Egypt works.

Obviously everyone in Egypt was doing similarly as well. However, when the mobile phones were suspended and parents could not reach their children, and they knew they were in Tahrir Square, they all went down to the square to make sure that the kids were okay, thereby tripling the size of the protests overnight. So it was obviously a tactical, if not strategic, error on the part of the government because once the parents got there, they stayed, or at least they stayed in spirit with their children and that created an echo of opposition that the regime clearly did not anticipate.

In addition to issues of information and authority, there were

several other common features in these protests around the region. You often hear the word dignity, and that is an important element in this. Clearly, in many places in the region, economic grievances played an important role in the early mobilization and Bouazizi in Tunisia was, in part, unhappy because he was having difficulty making a living. But, by and large, these were liberal participatory deliberate revolts almost reminiscent of the liberal democratic revolutions of the 19th century in Europe. That is, they were about demands for citizenship.

By and large, these were liberal participatory deliberate revolts almost reminiscent of the liberal democratic revolutions of the 19th century in Europe.

Now, this is not unrelated to economic status but it is somewhat different. These are not only bread riots — these are riots for rights and responsibilities. The nearly universally complacent, unresponsive, and often contemptuous policies and positions of the governments produced a nearly universal response — demands for effective citizenship, personal agency, and government accountability. Hence, in almost all of the protests, the accent on the rhetoric of dignity as opposed to the rhetoric of economic demands is significant.

Finally, the fourth element that was common is the demand

not only for rights but for responsibilities. In this, many of the aspiring citizens surprised even themselves. The community watches that sprang up in the wake of the still-mysterious, but as it turned out second tactical error of the Egyptian government — the instructive withdrawal of the police — demonstrated that Egypt was not on the brink of chaos as the government was trying to argue. It also demonstrated that ordinary citizens across the country and not just the protestors at Tahrir Square, Suez, and Alexandria would be able to take responsibility for their own neighborhood. Indeed, they wanted to take control of their neighborhoods and by extension their own country.

These are not only bread riots — these are riots for rights and responsibilities.

The little neighborhood watches that were produced on every street corner, as people went out and served to protect the neighborhood during the night, meant that people were meeting their neighbors for the first time in years. The atomization of Egypt by the police meant that many people lived in an apartment building where they didn't know any of the other people who lived there. Many people lived in neighborhoods where they didn't know anyone else. And so, citizens got to know each other as they policed the buildings and policed the neighborhoods. That extended well beyond the end of the protests.

This desire to participate, to be useful and productive members of society was apparent throughout the country, in those young and old who staffed those overnight community watch committees and manned the spontaneous roadblocks set up to protect residents from prisoners released when the police vanished. For the first time, neighbors of all social classes came out of their politically imposed isolation and got to know each other. And the young people at the barricades enjoyed the acknowledgement, respect, and gratitude of those they protected. This experience of new networks of trust marks a qualitative and permanent change in the conception and experience of citizenship on the part of many ordinary Egyptians, not just the protestors, and this continues to be evident in Egypt today. There is a completely different sense of what the responsibility of an ordinary Egyptian is to his neighbors, to his communities, and perforce to his country.

Different Trajectories

This is not unique to Egypt. It may be accentuated in Egypt but it is part of what these upheavals are about - they are demands for responsibility. But if these were common elements, obviously there have been very different trajectories and already very different outcomes, or at least medium-term outcomes in the Arab Spring. Obviously, there were different regimes, against which these protests were launched. And those different regimes reflect the



The French left a very different legacy in Tunisia from the British in Egypt and the Italians in Libya.

variety of differences we should always keep in mind. Obviously, there were different experiences of colonial rule and if you only take the three countries in which you have already seen regime change; the French left a very different legacy in Tunisia from the British in Egypt and the Italians in Libya. Those legacies were in turn shaped by very different styles of authoritarianism in the last sixty years.

From the style of Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia as the post-independence ruler; or Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt; or King Idris, the first ruler of independent Libya; and then obviously to the authoritarians who were overthrown — Ben Ali, Mubarak and Gaddafi — they oversaw very different economies in these three countries. I use these three because these are where we saw regime change, but it is also true that Yemen is very different and Syria again is very different. The small, relatively well-organized developmental state of Tunisia is quite different from the large, quite disorganized, and poorly planned state of Egypt today, and the chaos of the oil state — or oil non-state — of Libya.

So you see common impulses to revolt in very different contexts and that means that the character of the revolt and the consequences of revolt will obviously be filtered through these different contexts and have different outcomes in the different countries. It is

important to reconcile what's common and what's different. This is not all of Latin America and the regime change of the 1970s. There are clearly much more distinct trajectories in each of these countries than what was the case at that time, and of course, not all Latin American countries had the same experience either. But it is important that we see common features in the revolts and rebellions and not expect common outcomes. That was part of the mistake of the people who are making policy, for example, in Washington and Europe during last January and February. They expected to see common outcomes because the impulse to rebellion was the same, not thinking systematically about how different these countries had grown to be.

But it is important that we see common features in the revolts and rebellions but not expect common outcomes.

Still, from Morocco to Yemen, we should be able to draw some generalizations and to develop a couple of hypotheses that might be useful as we try and think ahead about what these countries will look like in the next three to five years and perhaps longer. It is pretty clear looking to look across the region that governments that control large revenue streams and are independent of local labor were able to diffuse or control opposition. That is, rentier governments — oil-producing and gas-producing governments

—tend to be able to distribute resources so as to bolster acquiescence and strengthen coercion and thereby survive political protests.

Where there is no taxation, enhanced distribution appears to deflect calls for greater political representation. This seems to have been true for decades, and with one obvious exception, it appears to be true today. The putative character of the regime is of little consequence then to the stability, it is merely the fact that that particular regime deploys resources that it can distribute throughout society to deflect complaints. More

or less, democracy will not alter the regime's capacity to survive — as the apparent stability of regimes in otherwise diverse countries —

Enhanced distribution appears to deflect calls for greater political representation.

Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and Oman seem to illustrate. Obviously, however, Libya is the counter-example, which suggests that this cannot be the only factor. So there is a hypothesis that seems to be — with some modifications — reinforced or supported by the unevenness of the Arab Spring.

Another hypothesis which is less widespread in political science, but I think we ought to be taking seriously, is that timing is important. Quick, decisive responses to protestors' demands

enhance the prospect for regime survival. The three countries where the regime fell were characterized by slow and maladroit responses to the initial protests. Indeed in Egypt, had Mubarak made the concessions that he ultimately made even a week earlier he probably would have been able to last until September, which is when his term was supposed to be up, and the Egyptians who are now trying to struggle into elections would already have had their presidential elections. But, he temporized and was slow to respond, and therefore, we saw the fall of his regime, and the intervening confusion in Egypt.

Quick, decisive responses to protestors' demands enhance the prospect for regime survival.

The relative alacrity of the responses of the kings of Jordan, Morocco, and Oman in sacking their cabinets and promising further reform seems to have staved off and possibly defused altogether more serious calls for the downfall of the regime. Once again, this has little to do with the type of regime — monarchies can do this, other kinds of authoritarian regimes can do this. There is something to be said, however, for regimes or governments that have not been in office for so long that they have forgotten to pay attention to the demands that are being made by their people. That's a second thing that we need to be thinking about as we think about how we understand how these developed, and what the regimes did to

respond. Clearly as the spring wore on, all of the regimes in the region got much quicker and more attentive because they realized what had happened to the regimes that weren't paying enough attention.

Another hypothesis about what kinds of things contribute to regime survival is that monarchy may be a useful device by which rulers can distance themselves from the failings of their policies and salvage the regime by dismissing the government. This is the device that most of the monarchical regimes have deployed in the past, and it seems to have been useful to the kings of Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and

Oman. They could sack their governments, say, "it's not my fault," appoint new candidates and thereby seem to be able to suggest to the protestors that

Monarchy may be a useful device by which rulers can distance themselves from the failings of their policies and salvage the regime by dismissing the government.

they were both responsive and not responsible. But, the availability of the resources to the government and the agility of ruler is also important, and that confounds this correlation to some extent as Algeria may suggest.

Regime Survival

There are certain kinds of things we want to look at to explain

why regimes were able to survive and certain kinds of things I think we can say about the regimes that fell. And I want to say a couple of things in general about the regimes that fell and then look a little bit at Egypt particularly. In countries where affiliation to the state is widespread and clear-cut, discarding the regime was relatively unthreatening; Tunisia and Egypt. Very few Tunisians doubt their status as a citizen of Tunisia and very few Egyptians doubt their status as a citizen of Egypt, and this is independent of the kind of government they have. No Egyptian or Tunisian worried that his passport would become worthless or that his right to live in his country would be challenged should the president resign and the constitution be rewritten. Like the civilian administration, the militaries in both of these countries were relatively strong, relatively coherent, and relatively well-disciplined. And they saw themselves as protectors of the nation and the state, not the regime, an important distinction. When pressed, they were prepared to sacrifice the regime for what they believed to be the good of the state.

The military saw themselves as protectors of the nation and the state, not the regime.

You then have a question about how coherent and strong the state itself is. In countries where the state is weak, where it does not, for example, enjoy a monopoly on violence or where the legitimacy

of that monopoly is widely contested, regime change entails state collapse, and we have a clear-cut case of that in Libya. Libya displayed the name of a country, the Socialist Libyan Arab People Jamahiriya to which very few Libyans felt any affinity or loyalty. The breakdown of the regime triggered a collapse of what state apparatus there was, civilian and military alike, which in turn provoked political opportunism and alliance building that may or may not have been sustainable. We will see now what happens now that Gaddafi is out of power. The question, however, is basically that when the regime was removed, the country itself began to come apart. And the project in Libya will be the reconstruction of the country. Similarly in Yemen, where the authority of the tribal leaders routinely trumps that of the central government, the prospect of the fall of the regime threatens to remove the device by which the tribes have negotiated their relations.

What's the difference between Libya and Yemen? In large measure, the difference is Saudi Arabia. And it's the Saudis' lack of enthusiasm for the Arab Spring and their commitment to ensuring that it does not further develop in the Arabian Peninsula. So, as we saw, they were prepared to put their own troops in Bahrain to prevent the continuing protests there, and it's fairly clear that they are not going to countenance real, genuine regime change in Yemen. Although they may be willing to sacrifice the person of



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Ali Abdullah Saleh. They are not going to be interested in seeing a genuine regime change. In Libya, by contrast, there was virtually no country in the Arab League that was not enthusiastic about the prospect of regime change, even if it came at the cost of genuine violence and chaos in Libya. The Arab League supported the NATO ‘Responsibility to Protect’ rationale for supporting the rebellion and it was clear that Gaddafi had no friends. By contrast, the Saudis have ensured that in the Arabian Peninsula they will support the regimes.

The Saudis have ensured that in the Arabian Peninsula they will support the regimes.

The interesting case is really in a sense between the two ends of the spectrum — strong state, virtually no state. What’s going on in Syria? In countries where the project of the regime is state-building — and I would argue that is the project of the Syrian regime, as it had been in the Iraqi regime — the identity of the regime is so closely tied to that of the state itself that efforts to dislodge the regime are interpreted as a challenge to the state. Here, the regime and its allies are better equipped than their weak state counterparts. They have built at least some of the elements of a modern state, a strong standing army, for example, and a public bureaucracy. But unlike the regimes in strong states, this relatively strong military and civilian administration is a reflection and extension

of the regime and its ambitions. The state apparatus is a tool of the regime. These state-building regimes and their supporters have everything to lose should the regime fall and the state-building project be reversed — as has become unfortunately obvious in Iraq.

Hence, the military behaves not as the guardian of the still nascent state, but as the instrument of the strong and determined regime. They are likely to be quite brutal in suppressing opposition. This is one of the reasons why it has been so difficult for any of the countries around Syria, or any of the countries that have been allies of Syria to figure out how to influence the Syrian regime. This is because they know what the Syrian regime knows — that the Syrian military establishment and the civilian administration are designed to support the regime. If the regime goes, then you do risk what happened ultimately in Iraq. Think about the internet, think about the regional politics, think about the countries that are bordering Syria, nobody wants what you're seeing in Libya in Syria today. They didn't want it in Iraq when it happened, they didn't want it in Lebanon during the civil war, and they don't want it in Syria. So, there's a real policy challenge in trying to think about how to support the Syrian opposition in a way that would not have the outcome of destroying not only the regime, but the state apparatus that it has been constructing.

Possible Outcomes

What does this all mean for the Arab uprisings of 2011? There is ample reason to be optimistic in Egypt and Tunisia. Strong states — populations with robust identities as citizens and increasingly experienced and agile political actors — bode well for successful, if contentious, transitions and the building of sustainable institutions of more open, transparent, and accountable government. And I think that will happen in Tunisia, and I think with some more difficulty, it will happen in Egypt. The amplified importance of individual skill in circumstances of weak institutions does heighten the contingent quality of some of the specific outcomes. The skills of the members of government, the military leadership, the protest organizers, and public intellectuals will shape some of the process, including its speed and its institutional results. And, of course, what this evokes to an American is the powerful influence of the individuals who are the American founding fathers, that there is a moment in which the importance of an individual's skill is amplified and is particularly important when the construction of new institutions is part of what the project is.

There is ample reason to be optimistic in Egypt and Tunisia.

For countries facing state collapse like Libya, the longer stalemate in the civil war is going to go on, the more difficult reconstruction

becomes. This is going to be an extremely difficult project. Tribal and regional networks have shifted and shrank, political opportunism has been reinforced as a survival strategy, and mistrust has grown not only between the supporters of the old regime and its opponents but among and within the general population. The crucial supporting role of international military assistance in the prosecution of the rebellion suggests the continued likelihood of reliance on international institutions for both military and civilian reconstruction.

In this, I must say I would like to accent the as yet still not particularly well-known role of Qatar in supporting some of these oppositions, notably the opposition in Libya. They provided nearly half a billion dollars of military equipment and other support as well as technical training of some of the militias that were opposing Gaddafi, and I think the likelihood that they do not expect to continue to be playing an important role in Libya is slim. So, the strategic rationale for that tactical victory on Qatar's part is still somewhat murky, but I think one thing to watch if you're interested in how the region as a whole begins to develop and particularly what happens in Libya is to look at the role of the Qataris.

For the regimes that are constructing states — and I think this includes not only Syria but also Algeria and Iraq, which both

saw ample violence in the last twenty years — the international community will be confronted with the challenge of taking seriously its commitment to ‘Responsibility to Protect’ populations at risk from their own governments. State formation in Europe was a brutal affair, privileging the fortunate and destroying the unlucky and ill-fated. European states built up military apparatuses through sustained struggles with their subject populations and by means of selective extension of protection throughout the different classes within those populations. There is no reason to think that state formation in the Americas or in the Arab world or anywhere else will be different. And that does not bode well for peaceful resolution of many of these conflicts.

State formation in Europe was a brutal affair. There is no reason to think that state formation in the Arab world will be different.

The Tunisian Precedent

A few final thoughts about Egypt itself. The fact that Tunisia was going first is a great advantage to Egypt. Tunisia has a much less difficult challenge than Egypt, because it is relatively small, it has a relatively high per capita income, relatively low unemployment, the economy is — by Egyptian standards — relatively well-organized and relatively prosperous. The fact, however, that it’s going first and is probably going to do relatively well in managing a transition

to a new government does represent a great boon for Egypt. So, the neighborhood effect — or at least the demonstration effect — in how these processes play out is going to continue to be important. The Tunisians have shown that it is possible to conduct free and fair elections. That's important in Egypt because there is still a lot of debate on whether it is possible in Egypt and had the Tunisians failed, most Egyptians would have concluded that it is impossible. The fact that the Tunisians succeeded means that the Egyptians were “put on notice” that they have no excuses; they ought to be able to do the same thing.

They hope — although I think the hope is mixed with a little bit of anxiety — that they will be able to conduct free and fair elections that are relatively non-violent. They are concerned that a lot of the old regime's supporters will come out of the woodwork and there will be violence during some of the election days. So, people held their breath but at least the Tunisians have shown that it is possible at least in some circumstances in the region and therefore they're providing an opportunity for the optimists. They have also shown that, at least at this juncture, secular liberal parties can collaborate with Islamist parties, something that was also an open question before the Tunisian elections and the negotiations that have taken place since those elections. Many people across the region are very anxious about what role the Islamist parties will play if they get

more political power. And the willingness of the secular liberal parties in Tunisia to work collaboratively with Islamist parties in Tunisia does suggest that there will be an opening for that kind of a national unity government, or national unity spirit in the context of whatever the outcome of Egyptian elections are.

Tunisia, in some respects, illustrates both the challenges and opportunities that confront Egypt. Egypt is however far more complex, much larger; it's eight times the size of Tunisia and much less well-disciplined in economic terms. It is estimated that about half the commercial transactions that take place in Egypt are unrecorded. That is to say, half of the economy is informal. So most of what we read about Egypt in World Bank's statistics is deeply flawed by the fact that most — or at least a significant part — of the economy is simply unrecorded and unreflected in those statistics.

There is an enormous informal economy in Egypt, and I can give you an example from the university. It was only last year that all our employees had to have a bank account to work at the American University at Cairo; before then, we were paying some of our staff in cash. And if we were paying people in cash, believe me; most people were being paid in cash in Egypt. This suggests not only that we don't really know a great deal about the economic

Many people across the region are very anxious about what role the Islamist parties will play if they get more political power.



grievances that Egyptians may have as they go into the polls but there is a comparable “informal polity” in Egypt that we don’t really know

We don’t really know very much about the politics that goes on in the informal economy.

very much about either. And this is one of the reasons why it is very difficult for people to predict what the outcome of the elections is going to be.

Predicting Election Outcomes

Everybody knows that there are vast numbers of Egyptians, literally tens of millions of Egyptians, who may have a national identity card, but that’s about it. That is to say they don’t have a bank account and they don’t have a formal job. We, who keep statistics and collect data, don’t really know much about their lives, and therefore we don’t know much about their political leanings and inclinations. So, sometimes you will hear that is where the Muslim Brotherhood is going to do very well, that is, where Islamists have been out doing charitable good work in this community for years and years. This may be the case in these communities, particularly in the rural areas. But it is also true that these areas had the strongest support for the old ruling party, because it was patronage politics.

It’s still not clear how the remnants of the ruling party are being

organized and which political parties are going to be representing the remnants of the old, now defunct, ruling party. They may in fact — running as independents or running as members of some of the more secular parties — end up being far more successful in the election than anyone is anticipating because they still represent the local notables in all of the villages in which they have exercised the power of the incumbency for so many years. So, it's really anybody's guess what this informal political economy is going to produce in Egypt. And in that sense, Egypt is not like Tunisia, because there wasn't very much that people didn't know about the leanings of individual voters or constituencies.

One of the interesting challenges is that information in general, and particularly in Egypt, is poorly collected and poorly disseminated. It has therefore privileged the importance of the social media, because they are a device by which to collect and disseminate information in the absence of other devices by which information is collected and disseminated, but they are only collecting and disseminating information about the people who use them. And they are obviously — even if everybody in Egypt has a mobile phone — they are not all tweeting, they are not all on Facebook, they are not actually the same people who are being reported on in these media. So it's not clear how some of these communities are going to respond to political campaigns, it is not clear how people

should be canvassing opinion, or organizing polling, or actually even campaigning.

Key Characteristics

To go back to the kinds of characteristics that I think are important, I think information is a crucial issue in Egypt; we simply don't have very much of it. Therefore, I think the unpredictability of outcomes for candidates and analysts is unusually high. Information is a theme here and changing conceptions of authority is a theme here. Protests were in some important ways fundamentally anti-authoritarian. And in that sense, the global Occupy Wall Street movement is also fundamentally anti-authoritarian. And there are many desirable qualities in these revolts as a result of that, but it also creates some problems. Notably in Egypt, we saw the absolute, principled refusal of the leaders of the protest to organize around a leadership, to identify leaders of the protest, to identify political parties that these people would adhere to, to establish an organizational structure with people who are understood to be the candidates for particular positions and so forth. This is a principled position on their part, but it means that their deep skepticism about authority is inhibiting their capacity to organize in a way that institutionalizes democratic politics.

**Information is
a theme here,
authority is
a theme here.**

Over the long run this may produce other kinds of political participation, but from the point of view of party politics in elections, refusing to organize as a party or to identify candidates makes it harder to prevail in that kind of institutional structure. On the one hand, they want a democratic institutional structure, but they don't want to participate in it on its own terms. So the disorganization of the party structure, the proliferation of multiple parties, the constant bickering among the protest leaders and their allies, and the skepticism about party politics as a whole has made it difficult to create clear and disciplined party organizations. Many people believe that this will privilege the Muslim Brotherhood, because the Muslim Brotherhood has been organized for a very long time and continues to be one of the best organized institutions in the country.

But interestingly, even the Brotherhood is having trouble staying organized. It has seen its own youth begin to defect, and keep in mind that much of the Brotherhood leadership — as is the case in Tunisia for that matter, but particularly in Egypt — is the same generation as Mubarak. They are all in their seventies; Mubarak was in his eighties. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) in Egypt and the leadership of the Brotherhood are the same generation. And insofar as this is in part a generational protest, they are all history, and yet they are who's there. So the question

Protestors' deep skepticism about authority is inhibiting their capacity to organize in a way that institutionalizes democratic politics.



of how they're going to organize and how the next generations are going to organize themselves for politics is a very interesting and analytically complex question.

The anti-authoritarianism has even been a challenge for the labor movement in Egypt, as lots of labor protests have popped up all over outside the structure of organized labor. Now that is partly because organized labor was organized by the old regime, but it's also true that much of this labor protest has been simply protest without being able to produce demands. There is tension between the evolution of this disorganization into party politics, and the character of the rural areas, which are still very deferential. The likelihood that the rural areas will vote for the patron, the local notable, is very high. And yet nobody, except perhaps the Brotherhood and the old regime remnants, is able to operate there.

I think dignity is still very much a feature of the revolution and a feature of contemporary politics. But, interestingly, I don't think any of the political leaders in government or in various political parties have been able to capitalize on that as much as they might have. One of the recent disappointments to many people in Egypt was the failure of the political parties — any of the political elites in the government and out of the government — to respond effectively to the incidents in which a number of protesting Copts

were killed by the military on October 9th. That violence against Copts should have elicited some of the same ‘We are all Egyptian’ rhetoric that characterized the revolution and it did not. There is still a kind of inability to seize the responsibility that the protest has accorded everyone and really use it effectively.

Finally, one last observation about responsibility itself. Despite what I just said about the failure of the political leadership to respond effectively to some of the challenges that they’ve met in the last few months, I’m still quite optimistic. Because if you look at Egypt today; you look at the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces; you look at the cabinet; you look at the political protestors and the kinds of groups that they are beginning to develop; you look at the putative presidential candidates like El Baradei and Amr Moussa; no one has given up. No one is still not deeply engaged in the challenge of designing, constructing, and making work institutions for a civilian, accountable, transparent government in Egypt. No one has given up.

If you look Egypt today ... no one has given up.

The Future of the Uprising

This is a country about which I often say, partly facetiously, there are eighty-five million political scientists in Egypt. Everybody wants to figure out how to get this done. And to me — perhaps

because I'm a political scientist and have a disciplinary bias — everyone is still playing his role in trying to figure out how to get to a conclusion here. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces is obviously concerned about its own prerogatives, the prerogatives of the military and so forth, but it also obviously doesn't want to rule.

This is not, in my view, a military coup. This is not a military junta; they don't want to be out in front; they want a civilian government with their own prerogatives secured; and that's what they are negotiating. But they are not negotiating ruling — they don't want to rule. The political parties are all contesting elections; they are all trying to figure out what is an incredibly baroque electoral system. It takes pages and pages to even explain what constituencies individuals run in, what constituencies they are listed in, why there are three rounds of elections. It's just unbelievably complicated, but everybody is out there trying to figure out how they can get candidates into constituencies at the times when the elections are going to be held.

The media is — by the standards of a perhaps more ordinary time and ordinary historical moment — a little bit raucous, but there are vibrant debates and criticism constantly of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, of the government, of the parties, and of each other. This is a public sphere that is absolutely seized

with trying to figure out how to get this process moved along. And in that sense, anybody can follow current events in Egypt better than anywhere else. Egypt has the highest per capita number of bloggers in the world. So follow the blogs, where you really can see a lot of these debates on blogs and it's fascinating. It is fascinating to see how deeply committed people are to understanding, explaining, criticizing, and continuing these debates about what the ideal arrangement should be.

Egypt has the highest per capita number of bloggers in the world.

Even the old guard, even the remnants of the old regime, are trying to figure out how to maneuver into a position where they don't lose everything, where they can see a role for themselves in a new Egypt. It's complicated, it's difficult, it's clear that people are going to be making mistakes — people have already made mistakes, mistakes are part of politics. And there are people who are sometimes being mischievous; there is no doubt about that. I think there are mischievous elements within Egypt and obviously as everyone gets angry, somebody will suggest that there are foreign elements in Egypt that are being mischievous and probably that may be partly true.

But at the end of the day, the goodwill and the conviction that

Egypt can do better is so widespread that it is hard to imagine that, mistakes and all, they will not accomplish a great deal in the next year or so. This is a country in the end in which real debate, real contention, and real contestation about how the country should be ruled is taking place, mostly peacefully and very openly. And everyone is taking their responsibilities to participate very seriously. For a population accustomed to stifling predictability and suffocating security, the insecurity and unpredictability of democratic politics is deeply disconcerting. But even that is becoming more and more part of daily life. So, I think the next six to twelve months is going to be very important for Egypt. But everyone in Egypt knows that. And everyone wants the country to profit from this extraordinary opportunity. That they don't agree on policy is still a challenge, but very much an opportunity and the beginning of real political life in Egypt. Thank you.

**Everyone is taking
their responsibilities
to participate very
seriously.**



Question and Answer

Question 1

My question is about Egyptian public opinion and the distribution among key actors and groups in Egypt in terms of their opinion of the NATO role in Libya. In particular, I'm wondering who thinks it was a generally positive intervention, who gives most of the credit to the Libyans themselves versus the role of NATO in overthrowing Gaddafi, and who thinks this is some sort of precedent, positive or negative, for other kinds of cases in the region. And finally, please also comment on the distribution of public opinion about the particular role of United States, this is an oversimplification but the U.S. is referred to as sort of "leading from behind" rather than being front and center in the intervention in Libya. I wonder if you mind giving us some insights on how that's viewed in Egypt. Thank you very much.

Lisa Anderson

Thank you. Let me start by saying that Egyptians don't care about Libya. And it is a matter of longstanding and considerable resentment on the part of Libyans that nobody really cares about Libya; Tunisians don't really care about Libya either, so this is not unique to Egypt. Egypt tends to be

— as any big country would be — a little self-preoccupied, particularly now. So, there isn't a lot of talk about

Libya; there wasn't before and there

still isn't. I think that most Egyptians are pleased that Gaddafi is out of power; they thought that his was a ridiculous regime, and didn't think that Libyans were particularly well served by it. But from their point of view, it didn't have much impact on their sense of the world.

**Egypt tends to be —
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Therefore, the question of NATO was not seen in terms of whether it was good or bad for Libya — it was more the issue of intervention. Most Egyptians are, like many in the region, not that enthusiastic about intervention. In so far as they reflect on that at all, and keep in mind they were really focused on domestic politics. Even now, what is a much more fraught set of questions — relations with Israel — have hardly come up in Egypt. That's how focused they are on domestic concerns. Foreign issues just are not that important

to them right now.

The fact that the Arab League did endorse the NATO intervention was important. And Egypt had a very awkward moment during the spring. Amr Moussa had been the Secretary General of the Arab League, and his term was coming to an end. Therefore there was supposed to be the election of a new Secretary General. The Egyptians were so preoccupied with domestic issues that they didn't really pay attention, and they nominated somebody who was a perfectly nice man, but not a particularly dynamic figure and not well-known in Arab national circles, and the Qataris nominated a very talented person. And it became clear on the day of the election that the Egyptian might lose. So there was this huge scramble that afternoon and the Egyptians withdrew their candidate and sacrificed a very talented Foreign Minister as their candidate, and he is now the Secretary General of the Arab League. But there was this moment where the Egyptians almost lost the Secretary Generalship to Qatar of all places and that was just unthinkable in Egypt. But the fact that they even got to the point where that could have happened was an indication that they simply were not paying attention to international affairs at all.

But it is true that both under Amr Moussa and under Nabil Elaraby, the Arab League did support NATO. It never questioned that after

the ministerial debate, and it has tried to take a collective regional responsibility on Syria, in part so as to not open up a larger, “should somebody come in and help the protestors” sort of debate (which I don’t think is going to happen on Syria but be that as it may). But I think that was in a sense from the Egyptian point of view, and from the Arab League point of view, an indication of what a liability Gaddafi had become. So they said, “Okay, fine, in this particular case, this is such an awful regime without a friend in the world.” We can countenance intervention. And keep in mind that there was a calculus at that moment where it looked like Gaddafi would prevail. This was at a time when the rebellion in Eastern Libya was not doing particularly well. And there was also a concern that if Gaddafi really could put down that rebellion, then what seemed to be the Arab Spring would not only lose steam but the momentum might be reversed.

And even the United States at that point, having finally decided that it was going to support the removal of Ben Ali and the removal of Mubarak, had said they also supported the removal of Gaddafi. So everybody at that point was sort of in a position to say, “Okay, the regime has to go and we’ll do what we can to ensure that happens.”

On the point of view of Egyptians towards the United States — which are not by and large relations seen through NATO, they are

direct American-Egyptian relations — one of the interesting things that the new American ambassador in Cairo has observed — her previous posting was as ambassador to Pakistan, and before that she was the ambassador of Colombia, so she is reputed to be the “ambassador to hard places” — is that the survey data shows the United States is less popular in Egypt than in Pakistan. She has never served in a place where the United States is less popular than it is today in Egypt.

Survey data shows the United States is less popular in Egypt than in Pakistan.

Why is that? I think there are two elements. One of which is, as we all know, the Obama administration was not agile and adroit about Mubarak — there were missteps. It is not that surprising to Egyptians that the U.S. would start the beginning of the uprising supporting Mubarak. We always had. But miscues along the way, just looked incompetent and it ended up looking like the U.S. was very reluctant to support the protests. And even if that were true, that particularly rankled because if you remember Obama’s speech in Cairo in June 2009 where he came out talking about human rights, open government, rights to participate, very strongly, huge expectations had been raised in the Arab world as a whole, and Egypt particularly.

The reason why the United States is so unpopular in Egypt is because of that speech. If he hadn't given it, nobody would have had any special expectations and we would have been bumping along as usual. There is such profound disappointment with the United States as a result of the promises now unfulfilled. The role of the United States, the role of the Obama administration, particularly Secretary Clinton, is very fraught. It has nothing to do with NATO, nothing to do with American policies in the region as a whole; it has to do with "Obama promised us some things and not only has he not delivered them, he has delivered nothing." So, the lesson in that is, "If you're the president of a country, do not go somewhere else and promise all sorts of things that you're not going to deliver." It makes your country less popular than it was before.

There is such profound disappointment with the United States as a result of the promises now unfulfilled.

Question 2

I want to go back to what you were saying earlier about the role of Qatar in Libya, and this was something that was talked about during the conference earlier this week. I wanted to ask you if you could give some more context as to what Qatar's grand strategy is — how does Libya fit into Qatar's interests, what is the relationship between the intervention in Qatar with, say, the role of Al Jazeera,

with the role of almost getting their candidate of Secretary General for Arab League. So, if you could give us some context about that, I would appreciate it.

Lisa Anderson

I don't think any of us know what is in the minds of the Qatari leadership, but for some time now, and Al Jazeera is one of the first obvious indications of this, they have wanted to project their power in the region well beyond the power that would ordinarily be accorded a country with a hundred and eighty thousand citizens. And apart from that fact — that the ruling family wants to throw its weight around beyond its own borders — it isn't altogether clear what they think they are doing.

In particular dyadic relationships you can see what they're doing. They had gotten into a dust-up with Mubarak, and the Qataris were considered even worse than Iran in Egyptian political circles before the revolution, so they were enthusiastic supporters of the protests and Al Jazeera in particular was an enthusiastic supporter of the protests, hence its offices were closed periodically during those eighteen days. But you can understand that in terms of the history of relations that had gone bad. And similarly, the putting up of somebody for the Secretary of General was partly anti-Egyptian and partly just trying to be powerful. There is an interest in the

Qatari ruling family in being powerful, and presumably being powerful in a positive way, however they understand that. So Al Jazeera did open up information in a way in the region that turned out to be hugely important. We tend to talk about Facebook, Twitter and so forth, but that was all preceded by satellite television and satellite television in Arabic was very important.

I think they played that kind of role as fostering the modernization of discourse in the region in a way that's very interesting. And if you look at their own domestic cultural policies, the Education City experiment of branch U.S. university campuses, while I don't think in the long-run it's going to be a great success, it is certainly one of the earliest experiments on how to foster and promote high quality education in the region, and how you get a research culture going – the Qatar Foundation funds research all over the Arab world. So, it's an interesting multilayered sort of policy, it's not just realpolitik, it's not just against some government or for another government. And, as for what they were doing in Libya, look, everybody in the region despised Gaddafi by the end. He had been mischievous with virtually everyone, so there was no love lost there.

If I was trying to think about the tactical reasons why the Qataris were there, it was probably to get in front of the Saudis. Because one of the things that people are really trying to figure out even

more than what Qatar is doing is what the Saudis are doing. What are they doing in Egypt? What are they doing in Libya? I think the

The Qataris have played a very interesting role given their relative weight in the region.

Qataris saw an opportunity to get in front of the Saudis in Libya, and then the Saudis were blocked from real influence in Libya. But, again, we are only speculating, it's really hard to tell. Certainly, they have played a very interesting role given their relative weight in the region.

Question 3

Thank you very much for giving us, and particularly myself, a comprehensive picture of what's going on in Egypt. It seems very complex and paradoxical at times. My question is a very brief one. Do you think that we are in a process of calling for a continuation of the revolution? Do we need to have another wave of revolution in Egypt, as some journalists and scholars are calling for at the moment? They predict that will be, somehow, to be a bloodier one than the first phase of the revolution. Do we need a second wave of revolution? For my second question, who is going to be the next president of Egypt? It is really perplexing, it is really difficult to tell but probably for you, as a resident in Egypt, first of all, and specialist in the Egyptian course, I think that you may have a final answer.

Lisa Anderson

There is an increasing concern that the spirit of the revolution, if you will, is beginning to get tangled up in complicated and not necessarily fruitful debates about things like the electoral system or the constitution. It's getting very technical. And I think some people who supported the revolution are concerned that it will — rather than be opposed directly the remnants of the old regime — lose steam because it's going to be debated to death. That it's all going to end up being these sort of, 'should this party be here?' or "what should be the process for discussing the constitution and the presidency?" And it is true; it's getting so technical that it's frustrating for many people. So I think there is a sense that it's losing steam in the technicalities.

And there may be increasing frustration in that and therefore support for doing something that revives the revolutionary spirit, reminds those people who are lost in these technicalities that this isn't really the point. The point is to do something much more ambitious and bigger and have more impact. I think that spirit is there. I think a lot will actually turn on the parliamentary elections at the end of the month on several scores. If they go smoothly, if they are well managed, if there is a sense of forward movement in the elections so that that stage of the election then would lead relatively smoothly to the next stage, one could imagine that that

would be heartening, that this process is in fact going ahead and is not being lost in the technical details. But the fact that the elections themselves are so technically complicated and are in these three stages is sort of frustrating. People want to know what the outcomes of the elections are going to be.

The fact that the elections themselves are so technically complicated and are in these three stages is frustrating.

The rationale for having these three electoral periods is there aren't enough judges to monitor all of the elections at the same time. So they will do a set of constituencies, then move on and do another set of constituencies, and do the third set of constituencies. The problem with that is at what point will anybody know what the outcomes of the elections are? You have to wait to the end to find out who won at the beginning — you should have to wait because otherwise that outcome will affect subsequent votes and subsequent constituencies — but if you have to wait so long, then that's a recipe for frustration, a recipe for rumors, a recipe for trying to figure out what happened and for exit polling to suggest things. So, it's not the best design for actually getting to an outcome smoothly and effectively.

If it does end up being frustrating — even if they proceed well and proceed without violence which is at the moment, probably the principle concern, there is ample opportunity during that period





for people to say that, “This whole election thing is ridiculous, so we’re not going to do this anymore.” So, if the first round does not go well, and/or there isn’t a sense of momentum coming out of it, then I can imagine that there would be an opportunity for people to say, “You know what, this was ridiculous, it was so complicated and the complications were designed to make all of us lose steam, so we are going to back out and have another revolution, the second revolution.”

A lot rides on the capacity to portray this as continuing the momentum of change. And I think it’s going to be hard to do that because I happen to

A lot rides on the capacity to portray this as continuing the momentum of change.

think myself that it’s unnecessarily baroque and complicated. And I do think it would have been, at the minimum, smarter to have the three sets much closer together. This is a recipe for frustration. There is a possibility that we see another revolutionary period. Now whether that’s going to be necessarily more violent, I doubt it. Clearly the remnants of the old regime and the police — there are lots more small arms around in Egypt than there were at this time last year, there is no doubt about that — are frustrated, but that’s producing common criminality rather than real political violence.

So, whether or not there is a second wave of protests saying, “This

whole electoral process isn't working, so we're going to go out to the streets and we're going to demand revision of how this process goes on," they are unlikely to be violent. Perhaps the events of Maspero and October 9th are a warning about what happens if the military themselves lose patience with the protests. But I don't think that's necessary at all. I can easily imagine a second wave of "corrective" protests but it wouldn't have to be violent.

On the question of who's going to be the next president, who do you think is going to be the next president? Who's going to be the next president of the United States? The wonderful thing about democracy is you don't actually know. Americans are used to that. We're used to saying, "It's probably going to be Obama, but what if Romney really runs a good campaign?" We do that all the time. But for Egyptians, "What do mean that you don't know who the next president is going to be?" They are just not used to it at all. That kind of unpredictability about democracy itself is something that people have to internalize in a way that they are just not accustomed to. So I think it would be better for the progress of democracy in Egypt if I didn't answer the question.

Unpredictability about democracy itself is something that people have to internalize in a way that they are just not accustomed to.

Question 4

The Internet, mobile phones, way of communications have transformed not just our way of living, but the style of movement radically. As you mentioned during your lecture, suspending the internet service and the mobile phone network did not work, but it actually made the students and citizens more united and stand against the Egyptian government. So, why is it not happening in the other Middle Eastern countries when the usage of cell phone and internet usage is increasing dramatically? I mean it is happening in some ways but not to the extent that students in Egypt brought it to work. So, my question is what can spark or initiate the students in other Middle Eastern countries to actively and positively engage and participate in the movement of free democracy? As a Korean, I can't help but to ask this kind of question but when will North Korea face this kind of circumstance?

Lisa Anderson

As I said, I think this phenomenon of the impact of using these technologies on people's conception of themselves as knowledgeable and responsible is a global phenomenon. People have now talked for a long time about the extent to which mobile phones allow fishermen to find out the price for their fish before they get to the market. The middleman is cut out. It empowers people in important ways. That's certainly true in Egypt; everybody

in the whole country knows what the price of a kilo of tomatoes is.

So, there is kind of information that does empower you. You no longer have to be at the mercy of people who tell you things whether they are true or not and I think that's a hugely important change, not just for students, but for people in general. But I do think that younger people are more accustomed to that and think that it comes with a certain set of rights and responsibilities. Older people tend to think they are lucky to know the price of tomatoes, while younger people, who have always known the price of tomatoes, think they should be able to do something with that information, it should give them some leverage.

I think that's a common experience. In some respects, Egypt is further along in that development, probably for one reason I can't explain and one reason that seems trivial but isn't. The trivial reason is that thanks to the geography of Egypt, it was relatively easy to put mobile phone networks in all of the populated areas, because it's just one long green strip. You just put your towers right down the Nile Valley and you've basically covered the whole country. There are no mountains or lakes; nothing gets in the way. So technically, to set up a mobile phone system in Egypt was very easy and it means that all sorts of people who were otherwise in remote areas — deep in the south, in the middle of the Delta,

even in Sinai — enjoy relatively simple geography for this kind of technology.

Right now, the mobile phone operators in Egypt are a little bit worried because they've reached one hundred percent penetration. So where's their growth going to be? Now they're having to go out to other countries. They're trying to figure out where their next markets are because they have saturated Egypt. But it does mean that Egypt is saturated and does have access information that is greater than the rest of the region and probably most of the world in a certain respects. I certainly think there's more mobile phone use and better service in Egypt than there is in the United States. To some extent, that accounts for why Egyptians are more fluent in using this technology.

The question of why Egyptians take to blogging with the enthusiasm they have is more difficult to answer. The only thing I can think of is a funny characteristic of Egyptians about which they themselves joke all the time. You can get anything and everything delivered in Egypt. You just call on the phone. McDonalds had take-out but doesn't deliver, everywhere but in Egypt; nowhere in the United States do they deliver, it's just not the business model. So perhaps the enthusiasm for blogging may be an extension of this preference for communicating from home.



What also distinguishes Egypt from other parts of the region is that these technologies are relatively accessible in Egypt. And the Egyptian government obviously made a big mistake in cutting internet and mobile phone communications during the revolution. If you look at the rest of the region: there was very oppressive censorship in Tunisia and elsewhere.

It was government policy that actually created the seeds of its own destruction.

Whatever else you might say about the Mubarak government, certainly since the period when Ahmed Nazif was minister for communications and then prime minister, he was pushing information technology communications for the last ten years or so. Everybody — even the most bitter opponents of the regime — acknowledge that the Mubarak regime, fostered an environment in which there was relatively open access to the internet. In that sense, it was government policy that actually created the seeds of its own destruction. Most regimes in the world, particularly authoritarian countries, want to see this sort of change. From that point of view, I think it's going to be a while until North Korea sees the same sort of phenomenon.

Question 5

I have two questions. One is about Gulf States. You mentioned strong and weak states, such as Syria and Iraq. I think maybe not

immediately, but later in Gulf States, there may be another Arab Spring. What do you think about these states like Saudi Arabia or UAE or Qatar? Are they strong states or weak states and in what aspects? This is my first question. And the second one is — as a student, this may be quite a personal question — whenever I read your work or hear your lectures, I think you have very specific analyses and various dimensions and so do you have any special way to see a country, very specifically?

Lisa Anderson

I'm not sure I can answer the second question. But, as you are a student, I'll give you what I think is an important piece of advice. I'll tell you a little story then it comes to the piece of advice. I remember talking to a colleague of mine around 1989-1990; he was a political theorist and he was about to go off to Eastern Europe and work on the new constitutions of Eastern Europe. And I said to him, "I didn't realize you knew anything about Eastern Europe or really cared about it, because you are a political theorist." And he said, "Lisa, how could I not be interested? It's virgin territory!" And I thought, 'You going to have a terrible time. There is no such thing as virgin territory in this world.'

One of the most important things that we as political scientists always have to remember is that we study real people and real

histories. It's not all models. It's not all about formal models or even constitutional design. And so how do you get at that as a student and as a scholar? History. I think the fact that I know something about what Libya was like before Gaddafi is going to be useful in thinking about what the challenges are after Gaddafi. And if all you do is study disembodied regime types or power balances, and don't think about the people who are living in them, you're not going to be able to understand, analyze or explain effectively.

Obviously, I think things are changing in Egypt in fundamental ways. But I also think knowing something about what Egypt was like under Mubarak, and under Sadat, and Abdul Nasser, and the British is important to understanding what's going to be happening in Egypt. So I do think time is an important analytical perspective.

On the Gulf States and the Arab Spring, keep in mind that Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world named after its ruling family. That should tell you something about what's politically important there. It's a country that is in many important respects, a reflection and extension of that family and it's almost impossible to imagine the country without the family. This is something that they have deliberately inculcated into the design of the institutions and political culture of the country and the way money is distributed. Not only can we not imagine Saudi Arabia without the Saudi

family, but most people in the kingdom have trouble imagining it without the family, which is of course the intent. We are all less rebellious when we cannot imagine an alternative future.

In Egypt, obviously people could imagine Egypt without the Mubarak regime. They can even imagine Egypt as a completely different kind of regime. But hardly anybody in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia can imagine that place without the Saudi royal family.

So, I don't think it's a strong state at

all. I think it's a very strong family.

That's a distinction that matters.

Time is an important analytical perspective.

When you have a strong state, you

can imagine the state without the people who rule because other people can rule a state that persists through time. When a state is weak, it's precisely when you pull the government or regime out that it unravels; which is what happened in Libya. The Saudis have been able to say, "You pull out our family and everything will unravel," and most people in the kingdom have trouble imagining an alternative. So it is very hard to organize a widespread protest or rebellion.

Now, there are many people in Saudi Arabia who will work within the system to improve it. Hence there are constant demands for opening more opportunities for women, there are more demands



for elections or local councils. But there is virtually nothing which is against the family's rule and says, "We want a

If you had a democratic Saudi Arabia, it wouldn't be Saudi. You would have to call it something else.

democratic Saudi Arabia." If you had a democratic Saudi Arabia, it wouldn't be Saudi. You would have to call it something else. In that sense, I think it's important to recognize that Saudi Arabia — and I am going to argue, the small Gulf States — are extensions of families. Because of the scale of Saudi Arabia, I think it is an interesting case where they have developed a very strong administration, but it serves at the pleasure of the family.

As for the smaller Gulf countries, how do they work? What is the relationship between the ruling family and everyone else who lives in their domains? I think a better conceptual framework than a "small state" is a "family-owned business." They have different categories of employees, including people who are eligible for certain kinds of positions in the public administration for which they are paid handsomely, and they have lots of employees who are not citizens. Qatar has 180,000 nationals; everybody else who lives there is literally an employee. So you have a family-owned business, a holding company, managing the country and subsidiary operations run by related families, and everybody else is an employee. Now you can do an awful lot operating that way and

they have the good fortune of also being members of the United Nations which Wal-Mart is not. But in some ways, if you want to understand how they operate and what they do, think of them as having a business model as much as a political regime,

I don't want to overstate this argument because obviously there are issues that are uniquely political in a unit that belongs to the United Nations; there is sovereignty, what does sovereignty mean? Wal-Mart and General Motors, Samsung and Hyundai are not sovereign. But in a lot of ways the internal dynamics are not so dissimilar and I think we can learn a lot about what kind of protests they're likely to face. Who are the shareholders? These are not really publicly held companies. What if they have labor protests? They'll treat them as labor protests, not as political protests. What we see in the Arab Spring is taking place in states, whether weak or strong. The small Gulf countries aren't really, in essence, states. There are virtually no other countries outside of the Arabian Peninsula that operate that way. So we don't have a lot of comparative cases except historically — which is another reason to study history, by the way!

Question 6

Before I ask my question, I wanted to note that there is a link between Egypt and North Korea. Did you know that Orascum is

the one who provides the cell phone services to North Korea? It apparently now has about 600,000 subscribers, which is huge. The question that I have was really about the nature of the protest itself. Now I was noting some of things you said when you were describing the protesters; that they refuse to organize; that you don't see particular leaders or organizations emerging from it, and you attribute that perhaps to the deeply anti-authoritarian nature of it. But I wanted to sort of push that a little further and actually ask could it maybe be that it wasn't really political to begin with? Now, I ask that question because a couple of years ago in Korea, we had the anti-U.S. beef protests — massive protests during the summer of 2008 — which almost toppled the then recently-elected government that was elected in a major landslide. And something that our own analysis actually revealed was that, at least in the beginning, the protests weren't necessarily politically motivated. There were no organizers behind it in the traditional sense.

But because we didn't know what it was, everybody said that this must have been anti-government, anti-U.S. elements of the older radical student movement that were behind all of this, controlling these youngsters. But the more we looked at it, it turns out they weren't. The question that immediately arises is, who exactly organized them? And then the only thing we could really come up with was that they were self-organizing. There was no grand

design behind it and they had many different issues that they were organizing for and around, but they weren't even necessarily political or ideological. But then it's certainly true that people eventually came along, a lot of people tried to take advantage of that and who did eventually turn the protests into something of an anti-American or anti-current government protest.

When I look at the protests taking place during the Arab Spring, I also get the sense sometimes that these are not necessarily politically-organized and these are not citizen-organized. It seems that the participants are not necessarily people who have a full-blown sense of political responsibility and rights that they're actually protesting for, but for something else. And that's where it becomes very confusing; we don't really yet know the true nature of some of these protests, and I just wanted to get your sense on that.

Lisa Anderson

That's a fabulous point. I do think there's something new happening here and it is hard to tell what it

is. I would say, again particularly in Egypt, the original protests were on Police Day and they were against police brutality — they were not to overthrow the regime. That aim developed over the

The original protests were not to overthrow the regime.

course of time and in part because of a very heavy-handed and unsophisticated response by the government.

I still believe that if Hosni Mubarak had said, “Gamal isn’t going to run, and I’m not going to run again after my term and I’m sorry about police brutality,” on the 28th of January, he would have stayed in power. In that sense, demands escalated, and then opportunities for them to escalate took place over the course of time. That certainly suggests a reason for the lack of preparation afterwards. The protesters didn’t expect the revolution to happen. They had gotten extremely sophisticated in organizing protests, better than they recognized, and the government’s response was less sophisticated than they expected it to be. And they prevailed.

Now what? There really was a little bit of, “Now what do we do?” after Mubarak left. And to this day, this sort of principled anti-authoritarian, “We’re not going to organize in the old ways,” is a legacy of having been created by un-institutionalized protests not as previously organized political parties who were merely using this protest mechanism. The protesters did not expect to be in this position.

The other thing of course is that there is enormous nostalgia for the utopia that Tahrir Square was. And, it clearly was a utopian



moment. It was a remarkable flowering of creativity and everybody who was there just loved it. Apart from a few days, it was basically peaceful and basically safe, and it is a moment that the Occupy Wall Street is trying to recreate. That's why there's a library and music and insistence on collective decision-making. It is trying to replicate the magic of Tahrir Square.

There is enormous nostalgia for the utopia that Tahrir Square was.

The question of how you translate that into politics is vexed. If this is a generation or a set of movements that is in some fundamental ways

anti-political, they are nonetheless confronting politics. They're stuck having to be political, because it was a political victory — Mubarak left. It is proving to be a very difficult transition, you're quite right. And whether they become accustomed to politics or politics itself changes over time — I hope we live so long to find out. It's going to be interesting.

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