

From #Jan25 to Tahrir: Expectations and Outcomes

It's still too early to conclude the turmoil unfolding in Egypt right now; because the full insights are not yet complete, but I'll try to point out to some facts in addition to my own analysis of the events so far.

These protests have started with some political, economical, and social demands, like: One, raising the minimum wage to 1,200 EGP and providing subventions to the unemployed. Two, ending the State of Emergency which has caused long-term paralysis to the Egyptian civil and political life for more than three decades, and releasing all the detainees with no definite charges. Three, dissolution of the People's Assembly of Egypt, the Egyptian Parliament, and changing the constitution to limit the presidential terms to two. The demands have changed gradually along the course of the protests to keep the pressure on the regime, the next stop was the amendment of the whole constitution, and the judicial supervision of the presidential elections. Until they peaked at the ultimate demand of a transition period and the overthrow of Mubarak, this is the demand which keeps most of the demonstrators staying put in Tahrir Square.

Let's trace the Egyptian protests back across the Mediterranean. Self-immolation of Mohamed Bouaziziⁱ in Sidi Bouzid was the firing point of the Tunisian massive protests, which overthrew ex-president Ben Ali. The Tunisian protests, in turn, were the firing level for Egypt's #Jan25ⁱⁱ. And it's very relevant to name it #Jan25, because they were totally internet driven, among many other names like Lotus Revolution, Revolution of Anger, and lately Tahrir Revolution, an Arabic equivalent for Revolution of Liberation. Hence it's not an overstatement to acknowledge that #SidiBouزيدⁱⁱⁱ is the sole parent of #Jan25*, in a domino effect that will not stop in Egypt.

If we consider that this revolution has succeeded somehow so far, then this will be the first organised revolution in the history of mankind. A facebook event called for this uprising at the beginning adopted by a very famous page called "We Are All Khaled Said^{iv}." So, the social media tools were very critical to fire these protests, after some Egyptian e-activists had adopted the Tunisian Jasmine Revolt, which has broken the border of fear from the autocratic regimes. The internet is unmistakably the origin of the Egyptian protests, and once it had broken loose, the internet has proved to be a very important tool for sharing news about the different demonstrations around Egypt, but the people had already found their way to the streets. That's why when the internet was blocked from the country in the early hours of Friday Jan 28th, as well as a total black out on all mobile networks, it never affected the ongoing protests and even backfired on the government; because all 'netizens' have marched into the streets instead of checking Twitter trends online. The freedom of internet content is a major

headache for the totalitarian regimes around the world, and that's why they all emulate the same violations against freedom of expression. By and large, it would be very fair to name the Egyptian Lotus Revolt as the first Internet Revolution of the era.

The Lotus Revolution, codenamed by some Egyptian enthusiasts, has been led by three main stages: One, the brutal murder of Khaled Said in Alexandria in the summer of 2010 by the Egyptian police, two, the Tunisian revolution, three the Al Baradei comeback to Egypt after his spell as the IAEA Director General. Dr Al Baradei has been a vocal critic of the regime for the past year, has inspired many youth, and gathered around 900,000 signings on a petition to negotiate with the regime about democratic reform. The result is an organised, yet leaderless, unprecedented massive protest that has jolted an autocratic regime ruling the country since 1981. The background of the three main stages has spanned for the last 13 years, the period at which General Habib Al-Adly served as the Egyptian Interior Minister, which has witnessed the rising unstoppable power of the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior and the infamous police violations, torture, unjustified arrests, and several crackdowns against political activists, netizens, and ordinary people alike.

The world has been watching Egypt's nascent protests closely for the last 15 days; the events that have seen many twists and turning points close to what happened in Tunisia. The major historic events include:

- Day of Anger, Tuesday Jan. 25th 2011: "The warming up to the protests," the day which commemorates the National Day of Police, whose unlimited authorities were among the key points to the unfolding protests. Batons, water cannons, and teargas grenades provided Egypt with its most popular sightseeing throughout the day.
- Friday of Anger, Jan. 28th: "High pressure point, or I've smelt this odour before!" The day kicked off with a total communication blackout, and didn't end with Egyptians sensitized to teargas. The protesters used a new tactic through demonstrating in many areas simultaneously which distracted the police forces who retreated around 6pm local time, leaving behind a state of chaos, before the military were deployed and the night time curfew announced. Cairo, Suez, Alexandria, and many other provinces witnessed massive protests. Mubarak gave his first speech; arson, looting, and vandalism spread - some of the negative aspects to this uprising, but indeed which have nothing to do with the peaceful protesters around Egypt. The different demo points gave rise later to the major focal point and the core of the protests afterwards – Tahrir Square. Teargas withdrawal effects were very common complaints for protesters after the

mysterious evaporation of police forces. We had a famous quote in Egypt before that day, for anyone who has lost anything, which goes something like "search with the police!" After that day, it was altered to, "search for the police!"

- March of Millions, Tuesday Feb. 1st: "Tahrir Carnival." That was really one of the greatest days of this uprising in the square. Hundreds of thousands gathered singing, chanting, joking, laughing, and sharing stories. It was indeed a Tahrir unconference. The second Mubarak speech followed later that day. The newly born local groups took a grip on the country, thus, the reported looting and mobbing cases dropped after surging during the last couple of days.
- Battle of Tahrir, Wednesday Feb. 2nd: "A bloody day in the square." A new turning point to the events, as pro-Mubarak marches, which appeared for the first time inspired by his speech the previous night, plus, according to some reports, hired thugs by the regime, on one side, clashed with the protesters in Tahrir Square on the other side. The peaceful protesters outnumbered the pro-Mubarak ones but they were on horses and camels armed with swords, whips, clubs, stones, rocks, pocket knives, and reportedly, Molotovs, ammo, and hitmen. At the end of the day, there were eight dead and tens of casualties among the protesters. Some commentators have called it the Egyptian Tiananmen Square.
- Friday of Departure, Feb. 4th: "The people want to overthrow the regime" has been the most famous chant through Egypt's protests. A YouTube video^v, streamed hundreds of thousands of times, shows the crowd while singing with a band performing live in the square. The song composes a megamix of the most famous chants. Apparently, it was a peaceful day. I've recorded a podcast here^{vi}.
- Sunday of the Martyrs, Feb. 6th: Christian hymns and Muslim prayers side-by-side in the square to honour the martyrs of the uprising, 300 at least, according to many reports, six self-immolated in Bouazizi copycats, 13 policemen, and thousands of casualties.
- Monday, Feb. 7th: Wael Ghonim, Google Egypt's executive, blogger, and the admin of the page "We Are All Khalid Said" has broken into tears on a satellite channel after he saw the victims of the protests. Wael has seen them for the first time after his release from a 9-day-detention. Wael's tears will yet to be proved as another turning point for the protests.
- Tuesday, Feb. 8th: A call for another March of Millions.

- Wednesday, Feb. 9th: A Candlelight Vigil to honour those who have died amid the unrest. Tahrir is the Egyptian Hyde Park now, and an annual festival is expected to honour the revolution.
- Thursday, Feb. 10th: The protests have continued to rise all over the country after some halt for the past days. The past quiet days have passed. Now, the revolution has gained momentum again, and the protest cyclone has broken once again. The third Mubarak speech followed in which he delegated his power to General Omar Suleiman. Another speech by Gen. Omar Suleiman to confirm that.
- Friday, Feb. 11th: Another call for March of Millions.

My banner on the first March of Millions was, "This is Egypt, not Iran." I'm not an Islamophobe though, because phobia implies an irrational fear of certain things, which isn't the case with political Islam. Political Islam is the main driving force behind some of the most horrible terrorist attacks in the history of mankind, and also the core base for states like Iran, and groups like Qa'ida, Taliban, Hezbollah, Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, (an MB arm), and others. A Sunni version of Iran in Egypt is my biggest fear, considering the popularity of MB in Egypt, let alone the organisation, finance, and resources of the MB as an establishment which dates back to 1928, which has paved the way for the detachment of terrorist groups like Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and Al Takfir Wal Hijra. The Jihadi school of thought is the world's most challenging danger at the moment – this is not a Western media agitprop, but simply a reality. Am I sure that MB will not take over after toppling the current protests? Or am I sure that they will not deprive the people from any democratic way of electing another after their take over? No, I'm not sure; history emphasises their lies. However I believe that the youth here in Egypt or there in Tunisia are aware of this – not all of them, but a significant percentage.

Let's take a closer look at the outcomes of the uprising so far, as Mubarak's regime has offered historic concessions forced by the demonstrator's pressures, like, the reshuffle of the cabinet, investigating the appeals on results of the parliamentary elections 2010, appointing Omar Suleiman as the Vice President, promising amendments to the constitution, promising that this term would be his final one, calling for negotiations with the demonstrating youth and the opposition parties, investigating some of the ex-ministers and the ruling NDP members' wealth, and others concessions are expected, still.

The Tunisian scenario is looming with only one difference: Mubarak hasn't stepped down or fled, and isn't willing to do so until the next general election. However, I think that these protests have succeeded so far to reach great milestones which haven't been

discussed in Egypt for the last 60 years. These protests have forced the regime to sacrifice a lot of popular faces, and feed on itself in order to survive. We've gained some reforms and promises, however the rest can be achieved through negotiations between the demonstrating youth and the government for many reasons; the most important is to regain the stability of the economy through the work and production which has broken during the protests, also the political opposition is very fragile at the moment after nearly 60 years of oppression under the military regime, and I don't think they're ready to take over, even for a transition period. Moreover, the voters don't have faith in any of them, so we'll have the privilege to move a step closer to a democratic reform through a new constitution and fair impartial presidential elections in September under full judicial supervision and perhaps international supervision too, whilst at the same time, deciding who is worth our votes. Whether Mubarak or Omar Suleiman is in power, it doesn't make a big difference, as they both belong to the same regime. Little bit late, worth the wait. I protested myself until Mubarak's second speech on Tuesday Feb. 1st, but I decided to stop protesting after that and started thinking about negotiation and increasing the awareness about the importance of this step, because it's now-or-never for the opposition to take a step closer to a real dialogue with the government after 60 years of mutism. This is my opinion, but not the Tahrir demonstrators, apparently.

I'm betting on these new "trend" of #revolutions of 2011 that are sweeping across the region. I think that they resemble the 1989 revolutions which resulted in the dissolution of the totalitarian communist USSR. Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, and co. will not reproduce a Lenin-USSR or a Khomeini-Iran, two of the most famous revolutions of the last century, which have produced more corrupt and totalitarian regimes than pre-revolution. The internet revolutions are different; because the youth who have called for them are very aware of the risks that may involve the birth of a new Islamist state in the region on the individual liberties and minorities from one side, and on the region and the world as a whole from another. Here comes our break-point as intellectuals; to analyse, write, explain, and debate with the mainstream, whether in Tunisia, Egypt, or any other country in the region, about the hazards of political Islam.

Stay tuned to our Egypt's voice^{vii} on CrowdVoice to get updates around the clock about the ongoing protests in Egypt.

N.B. Mideast Youth was hacked after going through a period of being under attack by anti-Kurdish groups. This came as a result of a video^{viii} we recently launched promoting the Kurdish cause for human rights, as well as writing about the upcoming Kurdish demonstrations, which was apparently the final straw for these hackers. If you

know anyone who can help, please get in touch through my email address below or you can also donate^{ix} to help us make the move to new servers affordable.

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ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Bouazizi

ⁱⁱ <http://twitter.com/#!/search?q=%23Jan25>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://twitter.com/#!/search/%23Sidibouzi>

^{iv} <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/elshaheed.co.uk>

^v <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahCwBBndIVY>

^{vi} <http://www.mideastyouth.com/2011/02/05/podcast-friday-of-departure-from-tahrir-square/>

^{vii} <http://crowdvoice.org/emergency-law-and-police-brutality-in-egypt>

^{viii} <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJo4NmJxzfo>

^{ix} <http://crowdvoice.chipin.com/alliance-for-kurdish-rights>