

19. Egypt and International Capital: Is this what Democracy looks like?

Edmund Berger

It was during the heyday of the Italian autonomist movement, as the country's mainstream Leftist factions moved into a close relationship with parties representing the dual Western interests of capital and militarization, that the militant psychiatrist and philosopher Felix Guattari made the observation that "a semi-tolerated, semi-encouraged, and co-opted protest could well be an intrinsic part of the system."¹ Fast forward to Egypt and the 'Arab Spring', and we can find those that opposed the Mubarak government, a puppet regime of the United States, utilized many of the same tactics as the autonomists - direct action, alternative media networks, and the occupation of public space. However, despite the fact that the interests of capital were opposed to those of the protestors, neoliberal interests were looking to this revolution with a keen eye. 'Democracy promotion', the ideological weapon of choice for neoliberalism, has long been at work in Egypt; this was confirmed by former Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, in an interview with Rachel Maddow, "You mentioned that I was chairman of the board of the National Democratic Institute. We have been working within Egypt for a very long time, in terms of developing various aspects of civil society, and dealing with various and talking to opposition groups who are prepared to participate in a fair and free election."² (See also Berger, Chapter 18.) Indeed, the earliest recorded 'democracy promotion' activities date back to 2005, when it looked like Mubarak's reign was without end. This article will attempt to unravel the manner in which the 'democracy promotion' agencies have attempted to embed their agendas within the protean grassroots networks in Egypt, in

particular following the uprisings, with the aim of subverting real or potential challenges to the neoliberal order.

Giving the Revolution a Helping Hand Early Rumbblings

While Hosni Mubarak had long been a key strategic ally of the United States, his relationship with the country became strained in the midst of the Bush administration's Freedom Agenda. In 2000, the Egyptian regime had jailed the popular dissident Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the founder of the pro-market Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies at the American University of Cairo, a common recipient of funding from National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Ibrahim, a future contributor to Fikra Forum (a program of AIPAC, the right-wing Israeli lobbying organization in the US), advisor to the *Journal of Democracy* (the official digest of the NED), and World Bank consultant, was moderate and pro-Western, unlike many of those who opposed the US's meddling in Egyptian affairs. He "favored peace with Israel, good relations with the United States, a secular state and free market reforms," it was reported in the *Los Angeles Times*.³ Freedom House conducted a display of solidarity by awarding Ibrahim the organization's Bette Bao Lord Award for Writing on Freedom, and in 2000 the Bush administration withheld an important aid package to Egypt. The plan worked - he was released in 2003 without charge. Bush's relationship with Mubarak, however, had drastically changed. "You're not the only dissident," Bush told Saad Eddin Ibrahim in a meeting in 2007, "I too am a dissident in Washington. Bureaucracy in the United States does not help change. It seems that Mubarak succeeded in brainwashing them."⁴ Clearly Bush saw himself in contrast with those in the government - including his own vice president - who continued to support the regime.

Two years prior to this meeting, however, the US government had already begun to take an active role in shaping the resistance to Mubarak within Egypt's civil society. Ayman Nour, a leader in the El-Ghad Party, told *Guardian* journalist Mark McKinnon that "some Americans... had offered to stage a Ukraine-style revolution for him around Egypt's 2005 presidential vote."⁵ El-Ghad's platform is moderate, supporting Palestinian rights and advocating the development of an Arab common market that would cooperate closely with the EU. The problem for Nour was that he "couldn't afford the price they were asking."⁶ This statement was made without elaboration, but before the year was out, he would face

circumstances similar to Ibrahim's five years earlier - he was jailed by the regime until 2009.

Even if Nour couldn't afford the price offered by the American 'democracy' promoters, they went to work in Cairo nonetheless in order to promote the version of 'resistance' they required. A private organization, the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), had "slipped into Cairo to conduct a workshop" on how to practice nonviolent resistance methods in the face of authoritarian governments.⁷ The workshop was of particular interest to the April 6 Movement, which had been founded by two El-Ghad volunteers, Ahmed Maher and Israa Abdel-Fattah, and incubated in the party's official headquarters.⁸ One participant, Dalia Ziada, reported that the ICNC's "trainees were active in both the Tunisia and Egypt revolts." Indeed, April 6 would play an essential role in the 'Arab Spring'.

At the helm of the ICNC is Peter Ackerman, a multimillionaire, member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a longtime chairman of Freedom House. His commitment to nonviolent resistance derives from the teachings of his mentor, Gene Sharp, the author of the famed *From Dictatorship to Democracy*. The work has become a manifesto for pacifist activists around the globe; when Serbia's Otpor! movement was struggling against Slobodan Milosevic, the IRI dispatched the retired Army colonel Robert Helvey to give the dissidents a crash-course in Sharp's work.⁹ After the success of Otpor's revolt, the students became teachers and disseminated Sharp's philosophy to the activists in Georgia's Rose Revolution and Ukraine's Orange Revolution. (See also Berger, Chapter 12.) When Ackerman was in Cairo, he provided the Egyptian democrats with *From Dictatorship to Democracy*. "Some activists translated excerpts of Mr. Sharp's work into Arabic, and... his message of 'attacking weaknesses of dictators' stuck with them," Ziada told the *New York Times*.¹⁰ Though the topic is beyond the reach of this article, it is certainly worth mentioning that Sharp's protest strategies rely on his conception of power, which he articulates rather simply as the toil of the subject/people under the ruler/government. Thus, his tactics are always geared towards oppression rooted in states. The exploitative system of capitalism is completely ejected from his analysis and as a consequence he provides no clear methodology for resistance.¹¹ Anti-capitalist, and even more radical anti-statist movements are pushed to the margins, theoretically cut off from much of mainstream nonviolent activism. Unsurprisingly, the place where Gene Sharp cultivated the early stages of his theories - Harvard's Center for International Affairs - was conceived as part of a Cold War-era program designed to "provide training for civilians who might later be involved in the formation of defense

policy.”¹²

Ackerman continues to work closely with former Otpor activists, most notably Ivan Marovic. Joined by the filmmaker Steve York, the two have designed *A Force More Powerful*, an educational video game that allows the player to “organize street demonstrations to topple a fictional dictator.”¹³ This isn’t the only multimedia project revolving around resistance - Ackerman and York had previously worked together in filming a documentary about the Otpor movement titled *Bringing Down a Dictator*. With frequent NED funding, the film has been shown around the world in troubled hotspots ripe with democratic unrest.

It’s prudent at this time to review some of Ackerman’s other connections, as his long resumé reveals certain dynamics about the world of ‘democracy promotion’. A committed capitalist, he’s a financier of the neoliberal Free Africa Foundation, the owner of the Chicago-based marketing consulting firm Upshot Inc., and an advisor to the libertarian CATO Institute’s Project on Social Security, which advocates the privatization of the American social security system. He’s also a member of the Business Advisory Council of the United States Olympic Committee, so it’s interesting to consider that the Committee’s president, William J. Hybl, is a board member of the International Republican Institute (IRI, the conservative subsidiary of the NED) and the chairman of the International Foundation for Election Systems. Meanwhile, Ackerman’s wife, Joanne Leedom-Ackerman, is a former reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor* and a board member of Human Rights Watch. She’s also a board member of the International Crisis Group, a connection deserving of further scrutiny.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) is a pro-interventionist conflict awareness organization that came into being in the build-up to NATO’s involvement in the Kosovo War in the 1990s. Financed by liberal philanthropists, such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, as well as the Open Society Institute, it generally keeps a low profile in the media (while its recommendations carry much weight in policy circles) and it has gained significant coverage several times in recent news cycles. When the Kony 2012 video, a short lived marketing piece urging intervention against the African warlord Joseph Kony, went viral on the internet, the fact that the ICG had already been urging the Obama administration to dispatch military advisors to Uganda became a repeated talking point amongst those skeptical of the movement’s true aims. It had also garnered attention when it became known that the organization’s board counted Mohamed ElBaradei, an Egyptian lawyer and former director general for the International Atomic Energy Agency, as a member.

When the ‘Arab Spring’ rocked Egypt, it seemed for a while that ElBaradei was on track to become the country’s first post-Mubarak president. The April 6 Movement was particularly enamored with him - when he returned to Egypt in February of 2010 he was greeted by a reception organized by the movement.¹⁴ “It is the biggest threat to President Mubarak since he came to power... ElBaradei has come to be a symbol now, a symbol to challenge that dinosaur,” Abdullah al-Ashaal, a diplomat and political science lecturer at the American University in Cairo, told *Al Jazeera*. Abdul Rahman Yusuf, who ran a pro-ElBaradei Facebook group, expressed similar sentiments: “Our aim is to bring together activists on the ground who can galvanize a popular base [for his election] through peaceful means.”¹⁵

Despite this support, ElBaradei’s presidential ambitions quickly turned sour. Mamdouh Hamza, an Egyptian businessman and associate of the April 6 Movement who had helped nurture the early days of the Tahir Square occupation, lambasted the lawyer, charging him with “having strong ties to Zionist institutions” and for his affiliation with the ICG.¹⁶ The association is indeed problematic: the ICG’s board is crammed full of individuals with connections to the world of interventionist foreign policy and ‘democracy promotion’ networks. It also features prominent Zionists such as Shimon Peres in its management, as well as individuals from the transnational capitalist class such as Stanley Fischer, the former head of Israel’s central bank and managing director of the IMF (Fischer had become renowned for his role in ‘democratizing’ the former Soviet Union). The following chart gives a cursory outline of some of the ICG’s connections:

International Crisis Group

Morton Abramowitz, *US ambassador*

Joanne Leedom-Ackerman, *novelist, journalist, wife of Peter Ackerman*

Affiliations

Former president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; director at the NED; director at Freedom House

Board member of the Albert Einstein Institution

International Crisis Group

Ken Adelman, *former US ambassador to the United Nations*

Martti Ahtisaari, *former President of Finland*

Zainab Bangura, *former chairman of Sierra Leone's Movement for Progress Party*

Zbigniew Brzezinski, *former National Security Adviser*

Kim Campbell, *former Canadian prime minister*

Wesley Clark, *former Supreme Commander of NATO*

Stanley Fischer, *president of CitiGroup International*

Leslie H. Gelb, *chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations*

Rita Hauser, *international lawyer*

Asma Jahangir, *UN's Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.*

Affiliations

Secretary at Freedom House

Advisor to the Open Society Institute

Former fellow at the NED; recipient of the 2006 NED Democracy Award; Steering Committee of the World Movement for Democracy

Director at the NED; advisory board member of the *Journal of Democracy*; trustee at Freedom House; director at the Council on Foreign Relations

Steering committee of the World Movement for Democracy

Director at the NED

First Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund; Vice President of Development Economics and Chief Economist at the World Bank

Trustee of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Advisor to Freedom House

Advisor the Democracy Coalition Project

International Crisis Group

Elliot F. Kulick,
*international lawyer and
corporate consultant*

Matthew McHugh,
*counselor to the president of
the World Bank*

Ayo Obe, *Nigeria-based
lawyer and peace activist*

Samantha Power, *President
Obama's Senior Director for
Multilateral Affairs*

Stephen Solarz, *former
Congressman from New York*

George Soros, *president and
chairman of Soros Fund
Management*

Affiliations

Board member of the NDI

Secretary of the NED, recipient of the
2004 NED Democracy Award

Steering committee of the World
Movement for Democracy

Strategy Committee for the Project for
Justice in Times of Transition (financed
by the NED and the Open Society
Institute); founder of the Carr Center for
Human Rights Policy

Consultant to the Carnegie Endowment
for International Peace; former director
of the NED, election observer for the
NDI; recipient of the 2001 NED
Democracy Award

Founder and chairman of the Open
Society Institute; advisor to the
Democracy Coalition Project

Returning to Peter Ackerman, both he and his wife can be found alongside the aforementioned Robert Helvey as directors of the Albert Einstein Institution, a non-profit founded in 1983 by Gene Sharp himself to study and promote nonviolent conflict resolution. Over the years the Institution has garnered grants from the NED, the IRI, and the Open Society Institute, and this money has allowed individuals from the organization to travel around the globe, consulting with pro-democracy dissidents and providing them with lessons in activism. While it may be true that the Albert Einstein Institution's work is progressive in nature, its intimate connection with the world of 'democracy promotion' begs certain questions, particularly given how, as we have already seen, 'democracy promotion' utilizes progressive idealism as a vehicle.

As well as reviewing Ackerman's ties to Freedom House and his extended relationship with the ICG, it is also beneficial to look to his partner at the ICNC, Jack Duvall. Duvall, the director for Ackerman's film *Bringing Down a Dictator*, has been listed as a contributor to Gozaar, an initiative of Freedom House tasked with 'democracy promotion' activities directed towards Iran (other contributors include Peter Ackerman, the Carnegie Endowment's Thomas Carothers, the NED's Carl Gershman, and Larry Diamond). Duvall can also be found alongside Freedom House's R. James Woolsey on the board of directors of the Arlington Institute, a "nonprofit research organization" founded by John L. Peterson, a futurist¹⁷ specializing in long-term strategic planning and leadership tactics. The organization maintains close ties to the corporate world and that of the government - "Clients include Boeing, Honda, all four branches of the U.S. military, and IBM Corp," brags one write-up.¹⁸ The Institute is also partnered with the Global Business Network, where Peterson is listed as a network member.

Serving beneath Ackerman and Duvall at the ICNC in the capacity of vice president is Berel Rodal, a longtime consultant to the Canadian government on management issues. Notably, Rodal's extracurricular activities includes an advisory position at the Myrmidon Group, "a small New York based consultancy with a representation in Kyiv that works with investors and corporations seeking entry into the complex but lucrative emerging markets of Ukraine and Eastern Europe."¹⁹ What is alarming here is that Myrmidon was founded by Adrian Karatnycky, a former affiliate of Social Democrats USA, alongside Carl Gershman and many other NED principles and early neoconservative figureheads, as well as the longtime president and CEO of Freedom House. Karatnycky thus holds close ties to the American interests that played a role in pushing the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine. This is something important to take note of - by managing a company that assists corporations entering into the Ukrainian market, there exists a potential conflict of interest. Indeed, Karatnycky has written about the 'Orange Revolution' in terms of its relevancy to economic interests:

... the growing influence of business on Ukraine's parties is a by-product of the intense political struggle. Since 2000 there have been two presidential and three parliamentary elections, as well as numerous local contests. The frequent elections generate a need to finance increasingly expensive campaigns. In turn, business leaders leverage financial support into a direct presence on party lists and influence over party programmes. As a result, the big parties all

espouse business-friendly, centrist economic policies when in office.²⁰

Rodal is no stranger to apparent cronyism of this type. In 2003 he was an advisor to *Trireme Partners LP*, a “venture capital firm” established shortly after September 11th by Henry Kissinger and Richard Perle (an associate of the Social Democrats USA, Project for the New American Century (PNAC) member, and Rumsfeld’s pick to chair the Defense Policy Board) to “invest in firms developing products and services relevant to homeland security and defense.”²¹ *Trireme*’s first investor was Boeing, which provided Perle with some \$20 million in start-up funds. Perle subsequently became a champion of Boeing, publishing op-eds lauding the corporation’s multimillion dollar defense contracts with the Pentagon. *Trireme*’s other board members also betray an explicit pro-corporate agenda, a case in point being the presence of the Canadian media mogul Conrad Black (the CEO of Hollinger International, the media giant that counts Perle and Kissinger on its director board). Black’s name has been linked to the Fraser Institute, a hard-right think-tank that escalated fears of the Canadian debt crisis in a bid to privatize the nation’s state-owned assets.²² The gambit was successful, and was carried out behind closed doors and away from the public’s eye.

These are strange bedfellows for pro-democracy advocates to have. From Ackerman to Duvall to Rodal, there has been a consistent pattern of corporate agenda-setting. When these conflicts of interests occur, the veneer of democracy quickly fades, and it begs the questions of just how altruistic the motives of ‘democracy’ promoters really are. At the same time, however, the last ICNC member to be examined here, Stephen Zunes, stands in sharp contrast to his predecessors. The chair of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of San Francisco, Zunes has been one of the most outspoken proponents of nonviolent resistance, drawing heavily on the writings of Gene Sharp in formulating his own theories for effective means of social change. His opposition to American hegemony, the disastrous meanderings in Iraq and the treatment of the Palestinians at the hands of Israel’s military has led him to being included in a list compiled by the neoconservative ideologue David Horowitz of the “101 most dangerous academics” in the educational system. Despite this, however, Zunes held a senior fellowship at the United States Institute for Peace, a taxpayer-funded institution that operates in a manner similar to the NED.²³

Aside from the USIP, Zunes is listed as a staff member of the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Actions and Strategies (CANVAS), “an

International network of trainers and consultants” founded in 2003 by two former members of the NED-linked Otpor movement in Serbia.²⁴ One of these individuals, Slobodan Djinovic, has risen from activist to telecommunications mogul after he founded Serbia’s first wireless internet provider; he uses his wealth to fund around half of CANVAS’s budget.²⁵ Additional funding comes from the IRI and Freedom House, according to a piece in the *Los Angeles Times*,²⁶ and thus it’s unsurprising that the organization has partnered with Freedom House for workshops and seminars for prospective activists. The operations of CANVAS are remarkably similar to that of the ICNC, and the two maintain a close-knit relationship. Just as Zunes plays a role in both organizations, there are additional interlocks between the ICNC and CANVAS - Kurt Schock, an academic in the field of sociology and global affairs, and John Gould, an associate professor of political science at Colorado College, split their time between each.

CANVAS’s appearance in the midst of the ‘Rose’ and ‘Orange Revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine raises questions over its relationship with the ICNC and its extended network of capitalist interest in the region. Several years later CANVAS popped up in Venezuela, providing training to anti-Chavez dissidents. While CANVAS maintains that its work exists separately from the sphere of US foreign policy, the work it did in Venezuela certainly dovetailed that conducted by the NED and the AEI in the country over the past decade.²⁷ By 2011 CANVAS had gone to Egypt to provide the April 6 activists with knowledge and training, continuing the Gene Sharp-inspired work of the ICNC begun six years prior.²⁸ But by this point major efforts had already been under way for some time, as the NED and Freedom House continued to assist the moderate networks needed to remove Mubarak from power.

Activating Civil Society: The Alliance for Youth Movements Summit

In 2008, the State Department, along with corporate interests representing the transnational technology sector (Facebook, Google, AT & T, Howcast, etc.) held the first annual Alliance of Youth Movements Summit in New York City to bring together grassroots pro-democracy activists from around the globe for seminars and networking sessions with trainers, benefactors, and advisors. The summit was the brainchild of James K. Glassman, a Bush cabinet member and a senior fellow at the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute; and Jared Cohen, who

had joined Condoleezza Rice's State Department in an advisory capacity (particularly pertaining to Iran). His forte was counter-radicalization tactics involving the then-emergent phenomenon of social media. This interest is clearly illustrated in the choice of key-note speaker for the summit: Oscar A. Morales Guevara, a Columbian-born peace activist who pioneered social media as a medium for raising awareness through his One Million Voices Against FARC organization.

Other high-profile players brought together under the rubric of the summit included Larry Diamond, Joe Rospars, the New Media Director for the Obama campaign, and Adnan Kifayat, who at the time was handling counter-terrorism issues and helping to give form to the proposed Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) at Bush's National Security Council. Yet another individual was Stuart W. Holliday, an assistant to President Bush, a lifetime member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and board member of the NED-linked International Foundation for Election Systems. In addition to these credentials, in 2006 Holliday was the president of the Meridian International Center, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit established to promote "international understanding through the exchange of people, ideas and the arts"²⁹ - a task it aims to accomplish with the help of deep-pocketed funders such as ExxonMobil, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Chevron, Bechtel, and none other than Peter and Joanne-Leedom Ackerman.

Perhaps most relevant to the current discussion is the presence of Sherif Mansour at the Youth Summit. At the time the program officer of Freedom House's Middle East division, Mansour had been a longtime participant in 'democracy promotion' networks. He held a year-long fellowship at the Center for Islam and Democracy, which boasts a president who has served as both a member of CIPE's Development Institute and the NED's former program director for the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. Another critical connection for the Center for Islam and Democracy is the NED and AIPAC sponsored Saad Eddin Ibrahim's membership of the board, which may explain Mansour's own personal trajectory: before entering into the fray of the Center and Freedom House, he had spent time at Ibrahim's pro-market Ibn Khaldun Center as the leader of an election monitoring coalition during the 2005 presidential race.

Given this direct tie between State Department planners and corporate interests with the grassroots unrest in Egypt (especially in light of Ackerman and the ICNC's 2005 trip to Cairo), the disclosure by WikiLeaks of confidential diplomatic cables discussing the Summit should not come as a shock. The cable in question, circulated in the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, revealed that one

leader of the April 6 Movement, Ahmed Saleh, had been in contact with “unnamed members of Freedom House” and had planned to travel to the New York summit.³⁰ Furthermore, Saleh reportedly had meetings with an “unnamed Amcit [American citizen] who advised him on potential Washington meetings and is working to include him in an early December dinner in New York with Egyptian activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim.” An additional cable contained references to Ahmed Saleh (although the name had been redacted upon publishing of the cables), describing his Washington meetings as “positive”, and revealed for the first time that “the Wafd, Nasserite, Karama and Tagammu parties, and the Muslim Brotherhood, Kifaya, and Revolutionary Socialist movements... [had] agreed to support an unwritten plan for a transition to a parliamentary democracy.”³¹

These efforts seemed to have begun to pay off within a year of the summit: a leaked cable from 2009 finds Saleh hard at work networking in America on behalf of April 6.³² He told the State Department that his trips across the Atlantic were being financed by Saad Eddin Ibrahim, and that he was operating in conjunction with Sherif Mansour at Freedom House to provide Ayman Nour with earlier electoral support. These efforts were reportedly being assisted by Dina Guirgis, an Egyptian expatriate living in Washington. Guirgis, the executive director of an NGO called Voices for a Democratic Egypt, had worked previously at the Ibn Khaldun Center, and cultivated additional ties inside the neoconservative establishment by holding a fellowship at WINEP’s Fikra Forum.

At this juncture it would be prudent to examine the actions of State Department advisor, Jared Cohen, in the years following the 2008 Alliance of Youth Movements Summit. Cohen was kept on in Obama’s administration, advising Hilary Clinton in the State Department on Iranian affairs. When the ‘Green Revolution’ hit Iran in 2009, he sought out the help of Twitter founder Jack Dorsey to ensure that the flow of social media continued undeterred.³³ The top brass of the administration, which had maintained a ‘hands-off Iran’ policy during the unrest (aside from continued NED funding to sectors of the protest movement),³⁴ was incensed at this intervention. “If it had been up to the White House, they would have fired him,” an insider said.³⁵

But Cohen did leave the State Department in 2010, and took a position at Google. Making the move with him was another veteran of ‘democracy promotion’ networks, J. Scott Carpenter, and the two former Washington officials went to work setting up Google Ideas, a ‘think/do tank’ tasked with generating political change on the global stage outside the usual power corridors of governments. An embodiment of the

transnational capital-driven civil society, Google Ideas often partners with elite institutions to conduct its work. For example, the corporate branch partnered with the Tribeca Film Festival (one of the organizations involved in the initial 2008 Alliance of Youth Movements Summit) and the Council on Foreign Relations to host an 'Idea Summit', a platform to analyze how technological advancements can provide "freedom from fear."³⁶

Cohen's new corporate position also allowed him opportunities to travel around the world to hot-spots of pro-democracy uprisings. In January 2011 he found himself in Egypt, where he had dinner with Wael Ghonim, the head of Google's marketing department for the corporation's Middle East and North Africa division. Ghonim was then on leave from the company, utilizing his time instead to assist in the burgeoning revolutionary movement. Like his friend Cohen, his specialty is in social media: the previous year he had used Facebook to rally activists following the torturing to death of an Egyptian citizen at the hand of the authorities. Through the digital space he built networks with the other opposition movements, and began to call for an Egyptian equivalent of the Tunisia uprisings, a demand that resounded through the politically charged civil society. The response was the mass demonstrations that shook the country on January 25th. Cohen's dinner with Ghonim, incidentally, took place the night before the launch of the revolution.

Cohen's trajectory from the State Department to Google and his propensity for revolutionary jet-setting caught the eye of Stratfor Forecasting Inc., a Texas-based global intelligence company that provides data analysis to governments, the media, and corporations. Particularly keen on investigating Cohen was Stratfor's vice president of counterterrorism, Fred Burton, who cultivated a series of contacts deep into Google's executive hierarchy. Burton's email correspondences concerning Cohen were released to the public through WikiLeaks, and their contents are quite revealing: "Jared Cohen, the Google policy official who met w/ [Ghonim] the Google Gypo Exec, ONE HOUR before the poor chap was nabbed, is off to Gaza next week... per a very good Google source," Burton reported to one intelligence analyst:³⁷ "Google is not clear if Cohen is operating w/a State Dept/WH license, or a hippie activist." However, in another message, this time between Burton and Stratfor's CEO and founder, Burton's Google sources seemed to have been leaning towards the notion that Cohen is not as divested from Washington as previously believed: "the inference is relative to Cohen working for the State Dept and WH to support Arab regime changes." Friedman responded with the brief note that he is "thinking I may be on

the right track about him despite his denials.”³⁸

Aligning Economics and Political Parties

In 2009 the NED’s funding to Egyptian activist networks totaled \$1,409,621; a year later it had been increased to \$2,399,457. Over the recent years a great deal of money has flowed to CIPE for a myriad of programs: to “work with universities to incorporate CIPE’s Development Institute into their curriculum; and conduct workshops at the governorate [a division of a county] level to promote corporate citizenship”; to “build consensus on the reform priorities of Egypt’s business community through the National Business Agenda process and engage Egyptian policymakers to effect legislative and/or regulatory change based on the agenda’s recommendations”; and to “engage civil society organizations to participate in the democratic process by strengthening their capacity to advocate for free market legislative reform, and to build consensus on needed changes to the Egyptian legal environment to remove impediments to competition in a free market. CIPE will work with the Federation of Economic Development Associations (FEDA) to organize policy reform roundtables, draft policy position papers and an economic analysis report, and conduct policy and advocacy planning sessions for SME [Small to Medium Enterprise] business associations.”

Large sums went to similar projects, such as \$19,520 to the Cairo Liberal Forum in order to “expand the use of social advertising among young activists for the promotion of democratic ideas and values and build the capacity of a youth-led NGO.”³⁹ The Cairo Liberal Forum, incidentally, is “an Egyptian NGO that seeks to promote individual rights and free market principles”.⁴⁰ The head of the forum, Amr Bakly, appeared at a conference in 2011 hosted by Canada’s Fraser Institute to address the potential opportunities for free market reform in the restructured, post-‘Arab Spring’ Middle East. Levels of financing were also increasing for the Ibn Khaldun Center, amounting to \$65,000 the year before the uprising.

The NED was also in the business of providing money to Western organizations that could provide support for a revolutionary movement. Amongst these was Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), which received \$190,000 to “to build and strengthen the capacity of Egyptian NGOs to lead parliamentary tracking efforts and produce high quality policy and budget analyses.”⁴¹ Headquartered in Washington D.C., the

POMED's leadership draws from the usual 'democracy promotion' networks. There is Stephen McInerney, a foreign policy analyst and contributor to Fikra Forum; Lorne Kramer of the IRI and Kenneth Wollack of the NDI; the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Nathan Brown, Daniel Brumberg and Thomas Carothers; Larry Diamond; Noah Feldman from the Coalition Provisional Authority; Mark Palmer of Freedom House and the NED; Haleh Esfandiari, a former fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy; and Saad Eddin Ibrahim. \$21,900 also went to the American Islamic Congress (AIC), yet another place where Ibrahim can be found, serving on their board.

The AIC is certainly worth elaborating on. If POMED's orientation is more liberal in its outlook, the AIC leans towards neoconservatism. For example, the AIC's founder, Zainab Al-Suwaij, worked with the neoconservative Foundation for the Defense of Democracies to launch the pro-interventionist Women for a Free Iraq in 2003.⁴² The AIC and the Foundation also sided with the notoriously anti-feminist Independent Women's Forum to form the Iraqi Women's Educational Institute, and the aforementioned Haleh Esfandiari from POMED serves as an advisor to the organization. The AIC's interlocks with other neoconservative organizations through other board members, such as Khaleel Mohammed, a member of the pro-Zionist Intelligence Summit; and Hillel Fradkin, whose name has been linked to PNAC.

Certain opposition parties in Egypt maintained direct ties to this American neoconservative nexus. The most prominent of these has been Masr El-Om (Mother Egypt), which had been founded by Cynthia Farahat, an intellectual steeped in the market fundamentalism of Ayn Rand and a program officer at the Cairo offices of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty⁴³ - one of the German *Stiftungen* that initially inspired the structure of the NED. Farahat is a member of the Middle East Forum, a WINEP-aligned organization founded by the hard-line Zionist Daniel Pipes. In addition to the Forum, Farahat spends time at the Center for Security Policy, the brainchild of Frank Gaffney, one of the "key ideologues who are the nerve center of the Islamophobia network."⁴⁴ To gauge the attitudes of the Center, advisors and board members have included Elliot Abrams and Dick Cheney, as well as a host of corporate executives from defense contractor firms like Lockheed Martin and Boeing.

The viewpoint espoused by the Middle East Forum and the Center for Security Policy is clearly expressed in Farahat's own words. For her, Egypt's ideal future would be "small government, laissez-faire capitalism, individual liberty, and the ideals of the American Founding

Fathers.”⁴⁵ Echoing the anti-Islam lines of Pipes and Gaffney, she decries the prominence of the Egyptian Brotherhood, painting the multinational organization as dangerous theocrats in the model of Iran. For her, the ‘Arab Spring’ proved that the Americans were backing the Islamic movement, a concept that is parroted frequently in the far-right radio circuit in America: “The current administration and State Department obviously want the Muslim Brotherhood in power,” she told Joshua Lipana, a conservative internet blogger.⁴⁶ There is a degree of truth in what she says, but she fails to take into account the ‘common sense’ factor. Parties like hers do not gain the critical traction needed in a mass movement because they run on platforms that oppose many key aspects of Arab identity. As is made clear by RAND Corporation’s policy recommendation papers, moderate Muslim networks are the only truly viable vessel for ‘democracy promotion’ in the MENA region. The Muslim Brotherhood would fit the bill for this; the economic line given by the religious organization is certainly compatible with the West’s preferred transnational capitalism. “The core of the economic vision of Brotherhood,” said one member, “is extreme capitalist.” Meanwhile, two primary leaders of the Brotherhood in Egypt, Hassan Malek and Khairat el-Shater, are described as the “neoliberal faces” of the organization.⁴⁷ Both are members of Cairo’s business elite and are business partners, and have both made names for themselves in the new, post-Mubarak Egypt: el-Shater has been nominated as the deputy supreme guide of the Brotherhood’s political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, while Malek launched the Egyptian Business Development Association (EBDA). John Sullivan, executive director of CIPE, has been a speaker at at least one EBDA function.

The Muslim Brotherhood has garnered endorsements from the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, a neoliberal think-tank that, in the past, has received NED grants via CIPE. It is also firmly locked into Robinson’s TCC: the current executive director has been a longtime senior economist at the IMF, while the previous director has worked as an industrial economist at the World Bank since 1984. Consequently, the Muslim Brotherhood has found themselves unopposed to the idea of IMF aid to Egypt: “We will accept the loan, we don’t have a preconceived position against the IMF” says Malek.⁴⁸

Even so, the US has, for quite a while, kept the Brotherhood at arm’s length. It wasn’t really until 2007 that the foreign policy establishment began to make overtures towards the organization as a bid to foster dissent in Syria - a gamble that, if successful, would further isolate America’s chief *bête noire*, Iran.⁴⁹ Even so, the Muslim Brotherhood was kept on the back-burner as the ‘democracy’ promoters descended on the

country. Instead, the NED's annual reports for Egypt indicate that it was the El-Ghad Party, the political faction of which Ayman Nour was the leader that was the preferred vehicle. There exists a close relationship between NED grantees and El-Ghad: the party's former vice-president, Hisham Kassem, is Egypt's representative to the World Movement for Democracy,⁵⁰ while Dalia Ziada, the executive director of the Ibn Khaldun Center, a Fikra Forum contributor and attendee of the ICNC's workshop on Gene Sharp, is the founding chairwoman of the El-Ghad Party's Freedom and Rights Committee. Another primary NED grantee with a strong relationship to El-Ghad is the Egyptian Democracy Academy, a youth organization designed to teach 'students' "everything from how to evaluate a political candidate to how to use new media."⁵¹ The Academy's media coordinator is none other than April 6 founder Israa Abd Al Fatah Rashed (yet another Fikra Forum contributor), and its chairman is Hossam El Din Ali, a member of the El-Ghad high council. Meanwhile, the organization's program director, Ahmed Badawy, has attended a summit of the NED's World Movement for Democracy as representative of the El-Ghad Party.⁵² He has since become a contributor to Fikra Forum.

El-Ghad quickly moved itself into alignment with the Muslim Brotherhood during the 'Arab Spring'. It joined the Brotherhood's Democratic Alliance for Egypt alongside the Freedom Egypt Party, founded by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Amr Hamzawy. Another member organization of the Alliance was Justice Party, which had been founded by members of the April 6 Movement, and the National Association for Change, a political pressure group aiming to oust Mubarak, founded and headed up by Mohamed ElBaradei. Serving beneath him is Ayman Nour, Shadi Taha from El-Ghad's high council, and the Muslim Brotherhood's primary neoliberal ideologue, Saad El-Katany. But the road wasn't easy for the Brotherhood. "In the earliest days of the revolution last year, the Muslim Brotherhood drew criticism from many groups, accused of being latecomers to the uprising, then ultimately attempting to take it over," *Al-Monitor* reported.⁵³ Regardless, Ahmed Maher eventually announced that the April 6 Movement finally threw its weight behind the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate, Mohamed Morsi.⁵⁴ By the end of June 2012, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the interim governing body of the country after the removal of Mubarak, was gone, and Morsi had been elected president.

Of Democracy and Politics: Concluding Thoughts

This piece has not been an attempt to retell the story of the Egyptian uprisings, but to provide a cursory outline of the foreign interest involved. Furthermore, the actions laid out in the previous pages should not be taken as an anti-‘Arab Spring’ tract, or some other attempt to smear the name of what is one of the most important paradigm shifts of the modern age, a true victory for people power and a warning to autocratic dictatorships around the globe. There are many works out there examining the same issue of ‘democracy promotion’ in Egypt, and a great deal of them castigate the uprisings as a planned revolution, a conspiracy birthed in the halls of the State Department and executed by agent provocateurs and useful idiots. I believe this approach to be wrong; espousing such a viewpoint has a built-in power system skewed towards the West, and reflects the same mentality that drove colonialism in the first place; that is, the idea that the developing world could not possibly accomplish something of this scale of its own accord.

As mentioned earlier, ‘democracy promotion’ does not catalyze social unrest, it simply utilizes preexisting discontents, identifies dissenters, provides help and support before adjusting to any political changes that ensue. For example, as the NED gave the Egyptian protests legitimate tools on how to raise voter awareness, monitor elections, etc, IRI chairman John McCain travelled to Egypt with John Kerry and a delegation of American businessmen representing firms such as Boeing, Coca-Cola, Dow, ExxonMobil, General Electric and Marriot, among others. The *New York Time*’s write-up on the trip described it as “part of a broader trip to advance American economic ties in the region” and quoted McCain as saying that “the success and failure of the revolution in this part of the Arab world will be directly related to the ability of providing investments and jobs for the Egyptian people.”⁵⁵

There is also the question of just how dynamic the relationship between ‘democracy’ promoters and their beneficiaries is. When I posed the question to Otpor’s Ivan Marovic, he responded that “strong movements can engage with foreigners and maintain their independence. It is important to build the movement on your own first, because early support will eventually weaken the movement. It is better to spend some time on the margins and build your way up slowly so when this interaction happens you have enough leverage to drive the process.”⁵⁶ Professor Stephen Zunes, on the other hand, was a bit more wary of the NED specifically. “The NED is much more designed to promote the U.S. foreign policy agenda... Personally, I would have a hard

time working with them or accepting any money from them.”⁵⁷

Regardless of the opinions of those, like Marovic and Zunes, who operate on the periphery of the ‘democracy promotion’ apparatuses, subsequent events and agreements paint a clear portrait of why the State Department so eagerly engages in anti-regime activities. In early September, as the US government ironed out its debt-relief plans for Egypt, a delegation of over one-hundred businessmen - representing many of the same corporate firms that were involved in the Kerry/McCain expedition - travelled to Cairo to meet with Hassan Malik’s Egyptian Business Development Association. Two weeks earlier, the IMF’s managing director was also in Cairo, meeting with the top brass of the new government (including President Morsi himself) to draw up plans for a loan totalling somewhere between \$3.2 and \$4.8 billion.⁵⁸ As the protestors across the Eurozone know, entanglements with American business delegations and the IMF spell out one thing: austerity, despite whatever rhetoric about democracy flows down from the top as they make the painful cuts. There is no evidence to suggest that Morsi’s government will be any different; he already “announced plans to privatize publicly owned enterprises, reduce the deficit via elimination of basic subsidies to the poor, de-regulate the economy to increase the flow of foreign capital and end labor strikes.”⁵⁹

But even as ‘democracy promotion’ preaches a message of global peace, and despite being driven primarily by economic imperatives, there absolutely exists the potentiality for negative reactions. This had already played out in Iraq, as America’s actions fostered a massive counter-insurgency. It also shattered America’s credibility on the world stage. When Russia emerged from the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union, the helping hand offered by the ‘democracy’ promoters, the World Bank, and the IMF quickly transformed it into a free-falling economy, with runaway wealth concentrating in the upper classes, while statistics relating to suicide and violent crime dramatically worsened. It has led to a place where authoritarian leaders such as Putin can put musicians behind bars for speaking freely, once again attracting the attention of the ‘democracy’ promoters in the State Department.

It is absolutely vital that real democracy be promoted, and from below, without the constraints and restraints of elite NGOs and the moneyed interests that they represent. Band-aids only have a limited effect, for only so long, and if the perpetual cycles of violence, poverty, and unrest are to be quelled, then a real structural and systematic change must occur.

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