

Tuesday, March 1, 2011

### **Politics, Markets, and the Arab Region**

The events that began on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 will be at the very least some of the most exciting of the year. When TIME magazine and other news sources write their annual summaries of the year, it is very probable that they will describe the events from an unbiased point of view. I agree that this is an important milestone in history, and am interested in how the events that occurred will allow for the growth or decline of Egypt. The uprising that occurred and grew over the course of two weeks was not; however, an event that spawned from nothing, but instead can be traced to a series of events that lead up to a revolution that may act as a catalyst for many other events in the region. With the resignation of Hosni Mubarek, Egypt now has the possibility for new groups and organizations to use the mechanisms of social control. First, I will describe the overall process and course of events that allowed these groups to attain social control. Second, I will support these claims primarily with the academically agreed upon ideas of Charles Lindblom, Paul Seabright, and secondarily with other political economists from my experience, i.e. Mancur Olson. Finally, I will discuss how these groups are currently using the same mechanisms, that previous regimes have used, and are attempting to further their own personal regimes.

Through diplomatic and economic interactions between the two States, the United States of America (US) and Egypt, different ideologies were exchanged. Naturally, the US encourages any nation to accept the ideology of Democracy. Through influence of the United States' ideology, coupled with the surrounding events in Tunisia and other regional states, contradictory mindsets about the previous Egyptian regime began to take

hold. Under a regime like Mubarek, the mass of the population saw at least temporary legitimacy in the authority of his 30-year regime. To simplify the events, the mass of the population, and the overall ideology that they held led to the fracturing of any authority that Mubarek had. For reference, this overall mass is represented by many different sub-groups including the Egyptian police force, the military, the fragments that later gathered as large groups at Tahrir Square, and other unmentioned classes. Later, after initial uprising began, Mubarek attempted to maintain his power and regime through less efficient mechanisms of control. The support, and in turn legitimacy as a leader, that he once held with the US began to falter, and the same legitimacy that he once had with his people had left. Since they no longer saw his regime as valid, Mubarek was ultimately forced to use persuasion and coercion in a last attempt to sustain control.

According to Lindblom, authority exists in two basic forms. He suggests that coercive authority is less effective than legitimate authority (Lindblom). I agree with many political scholars, a la Hody, that coercive authority is an oxymoron and is similar to saying hot ice. Hot ice is simply put water, and likewise coercive authority is purely coercion. Coercion is described as the form of social control that was most prevalent during the Cold War period in the Soviet Union, and is a highly ineffective and inefficient form of controlling a population (Lindblom). Similarly, the control that existed in Mubarek's regime was a mixture of coercion and other forms. Persuasion is the act of convincing a group to accept legitimacy, but the overall attempt that Mubarek sought in combining these forms of control after he lost authority failed. Thus, the prior Egyptian regime ended with a highly ineffective form of social control, and logically, this explains the rationale for the collapse of this regime.

Through the continuous coverage of the international press corps and social networking technology, more fuel was added to the metaphorical fire of the uprising. A vicious cycle of further delegitimizing of the Mubarek regime with the poor defense of an ineffective means of social control led to the current, and new, regime taking power and control of Egypt.

In order to truly address what happened, and to help support the claim that an old pseudo-democratic regime could be overtaken by the masses of group striving for a true sense of the regime, I must address concepts from both Seabright and Olson. Both scholars address the ideas of current institutions, and for the purpose of this argument any set of rules that influence behavior is an institution. The organizations that formed to combat the Mubarek Egyptian regime were able to attain their levels of control because of the institutions that allowed them to. Simply put, the entire process of forming the uprising occurred because the institution allowed certain leaders to gain authority and others to lose their legitimacy as leaders.

As Olson discusses, homogeneous organizations are more effective than the large heterogeneous and unorganized masses of society. Not to focus on this subject primarily, but this explains the reasoning and logic behind why Mubarek could maintain social control for such an extended period of time. The prior Egyptian regime would have maintained its influence indefinitely if other more tightly knit groups did not form (Olson). Due to the existence of other uprisings in other states, it is clear that an overall encompassing thought had united all of these smaller organizations in a larger homogeneous democratic group. With the help of the media and other forms of communication, the democratic ideology quickly united all of these otherwise

unorganized heterogeneous masses into a larger more organized group (Olson).

According to Olson, a large homogeneous group, e.g. the uprising masses that have been occurring recently, is more effective than a small homogeneous regime, e.g. Mubarek's regime (Olson).

Seabright supports this in the clear presentation of a stage that is set to allow for the growth of these homogeneous groups. Trusting strangers is one of the first steps in that the social institutions falls to pieces if trust does not exist (Seabright). In the event of a homogeneous large group, an extraordinary amount of trust is instilled in the leader of that group, thus giving said leader the authority and legitimacy to make decisions. Without that trust, the institution begins to collapse, and in the case of Egypt, the Mubarek regime dissolved in the presence of the current, more legitimate, regime. Generally speaking, humanity is full of social creatures, and that interaction occurs between individuals and groups (Seabright). Also, having reciprocators in a group is important to group survival, and many of these groups have multiple reciprocators because reciprocators seek reciprocators (Seabright). The principle of strong-reciprocity with specialization created the foundation for cooperation and task sharing, which could not have existed without the initial trust that Seabright describes. In the case of Egypt, Seabright would argue that the homogeneous organizations formed only because specialization and classes encouraged cooperation. It was the responsibility of every person who desired democracy, and therefore different sub-groups agreed on specific roles. The existing formation of separate groups, i.e. the police, military, and sections of society, developed specific roles in the uprising. Seabright is a political-economist, and I am using his ideas in more of a political-sociological method. Perhaps it is a stretch of the

idea, but the concepts that he uses to describe what occurs in an economic situation are not as different as one would expect when compared on a sociological level. For example, the risk-sharing and knowledge accumulation is considered as more of an economic concern because fortunes can be gained or lost based upon the proper risk being shared supported by the knowledge being known (Seabright). However, because specialization occurs after the initial stages of this overall process, an accumulation of total knowledge occurs from the total knowledge of the specialists that are experts (Seabright). If these experts are political leaders and educated elites, as is the case in Egypt, then the economic theory applies to a socio-political scenario.

The homogeneous groups that formed, based upon the reasons that Seabright and Olson provide, only maintain their legitimacy as leaders and rulers through the most effective forms of social control, i.e. authority and exchange. Whereas exchange was, arguably, not as present during the uprising in Egypt and other states in the region, it had a minor role between international diplomatic relations, possibly between the US and Egypt. Democratic ideas are ‘attached’ to the economic benefits and interests associated with the trade that exists with all westernized states, especially the US.

In actuality, the previous regime and the current regime in Egypt are both using similar tactics. Coercion is utilized as either an initial catalyst, in the form of military control of the state, or a last resort, as in military deterrence of mass riot. Persuasion is employed as a transition or an attempt to restore order. Authority is the end goal of both regimes, because it establishes the power of the regime as permanent and legitimate. The political homogeneous regime dictates the exchange, and can further strengthen their ability. I predict the current regime mimicking the old regime, just with more leaders.

### **Work Cited**

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