

REGIONAL AFFAIRS



Dispatches From Tahrir

Inside Egypt's revolution and the last days of Mubarak

By **Ashraf Khalil**

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On Thursday January 27th, 2011, Safwat El Sherif, the secretary general of Egypt's ruling National Democratic Party, convened an abrupt press conference in the NDP's headquarters along the Nile, just outside of Tahrir Square.

Egypt had just witnessed its largest anti-government protests in a generation and more unrest was on the way. Protest organizers were calling for a massive turnout the following day, and everybody was feeling fired up by the sight of Tunisians hounding out their own longtime dictator Zine al Abidine Ben Ali earlier in the month. Clearly some sort of government response was called for.

President Hosni Mubarak's government couldn't have chosen a more appropriate spokesman. Sherif is a quintessential regime crony, a former information minister whose ties to Egypt's military rulers date back to Gamal Abdel Nasser in the Sixties. With his jet-black dye job and pancake makeup, the guy just looks like an old-school fascist pimp.

He didn't disappoint either, delivering a medley of NDP greatest hits – a 15-minute string of

March 13, 2011
Ballad Of A China Man

March 13, 2011
Beach Boys To Release Smile

March 13, 2011
Foo Fighters to release covers album

March 10, 2011
Sweet Child O'Finance

March 09, 2011
Let's Get Together

At least five times, he unleashed some variation on “The Party has its hand on the pulse of the youth.” Sherif concluded with a quote that should be engraved on his headstone: “Egypt is stable, God willing.”

Just over 24 hours later, the room that Sherif spoke from was in flames, and the historic Egyptian revolution was in full swing. If Sherif and his fellow NDP elders truly had their “hand on the pulse” of the people, they would have headed to the airport that night, because the people were baying for their blood.

The “Day of Rage” protests were the first nail in the coffin of Mubarak’s 29-year reign. On January 28th, protesters shattered the police state, defeated the Interior Ministry’s shock troops and took control of central Cairo’s Tahrir Square – pausing to gleefully burn down the NDP headquarters.

They wouldn’t relinquish their hold on Tahrir for weeks, turning the massive public space into a sort of militarized revolutionary utopia. Meanwhile Mubarak’s crumbling regime veered wildly between statements of arrogant defiance, half-assed concessions and, finally, increasingly beleaguered appeals for everybody to just go home.

Mubarak’s humiliating February 11th surrender, coming just one day after he pissed everybody off by publicly vowing not to leave, serves as a reminder of just how unstable these supposedly “stable” Middle Eastern societies can be. In the end, Mubarak’s regime was exposed as fragile, tone-deaf and intellectually bankrupt. At no point in the entire three-week whirlwind did the government seem to fully grasp just what was actually happening.

IF MUBARAK’S FALL was shockingly swift (given his tenure), the many seeds of his demise were years, if not decades, in the making. There were numerous forces that finally brought him down. But the short version is this: He and the people around him brought this on themselves. Mubarak’s apparently genuine confusion, and even hurt, at all the hatred being directed towards him served only to highlight just how completely detached he had become from the realities of the people living in the society he helped shape.

The various crimes of Mubarak’s era are still being unearthed; widespread low-level torture and rampant corruption will certainly top the list. But as modern dictators go, he would struggle even to make the Top 10.

He was never as violent or sadistic as Saddam Hussein, not even close. His longtime interior minister, Habib El-Adly, helped foster a culture of absolute lawlessness among the police and internal security forces. But there won’t be any post-Mubarak revelations of mass graves.

He was never as flamboyantly corrupt as some of his peers. Certainly, uncounted billions disappeared into the coffers of Mubarak and his cronies. But it all seemed to go to nice villas in gated communities outside of Cairo, beach houses on the Mediterranean coast and overseas bank accounts.

One editor called me recently to ask for examples of over-the-top extravagance on the part of Mubarak’s family and inner circle. He wanted something outrageous, on par with Imelda Marcos’s shoe collection, or Uday Hussein’s bizarre sex parties. There is really nothing to offer on that level.

Instead, Mubarak’s ultimate crime will be treating his people with contempt – openly disrespecting them for so long that many Egyptians lost both respect for themselves and their ability to change anything that was happening around them.

Mubarak’s 29 years in power had a genuinely corrosive effect on Egyptian society and psychology. He took a proud and ancient civilization and presided over the virtual collapse of its citizens’ sense of public empowerment and political engagement. He taught them how to feel helpless, then made them forget they had ever felt any other way.

Several successive generations were instilled with the belief that the system was indeed rotten to the core, but that there was nothing anyone could do about it. Anyone who tried to change that dynamic was regarded as a noble fool. Egyptians were taught to “walk next to the wall” – translation: Keep your head down, feed your family and don’t stick your nose in affairs of governance that are above your station.

Egypt under Mubarak, particularly in the last 15 years, became a more cutthroat place. Rule of



law was replaced by the law of the jungle. The causes: economic desperation and the vivid daily reminders that there was one set of rules for most and a completely different set for a select few.

The end result was a dramatic erosion of public morality and the trademark Egyptian sense of community. The idea of justice or equal treatment under the law became laughable. In all disputes, big or small, the issue of right or wrong became secondary to the all-important *wasta* – connections or influence.

But if the first 29 years of the Mubarak era helped kill Egyptians' self-confidence and sense of their own political empowerment, his last 18 days in power witnessed a dramatic resurgence of both. When the protesters took lasting control of Tahrir, something was unleashed. Reservoirs of confidence, creativity and empowerment emerged which some feared had been lost forever. Seeing the Egyptian people regain that sense of dignity, pride and ownership was arguably the most amazing – and important – aspect of the entire pressurized three-week Egyptian Revolution.

What was truly astonishing to observers – within Egypt and overseas – of the events that transpired between January 25th and February 11th was just how fast everything moved, and how quickly the mood and tone shifted from day to day and sometimes hour to hour.

January 25

A group of young activists, depending heavily on social media, announced a day of mass protests, partially in honor of the successful Tunisian revolution 10 days earlier. The date was mischievously chosen because it was a national holiday: Police Day.

A Facebook page announcing the protests had commitments to attend from 80,000 people. But nobody was really sure just how many would turn out and where.

Anticipation was high for days beforehand, due to both the Tunisian uprising and the recent string of public copycat self-immolations in Egypt.

Organizers originally called for crowds to gather outside the Interior Ministry, near Tahrir Square. That turned out to be a ruse; around 10.30 a.m., the word went out through Twitter and Facebook about a whole new set of gathering points and contact numbers.

The turnout exceeded all expectations. A series of scattered protests moved through different parts of the city, growing in strength as they joined up with other groups and induced onlookers and residents to join in.

I spent the day moving throughout downtown Cairo trying to keep track of a dizzying series of fast-moving events. One group of marchers, moving through the Boulaq area, seemed to make a point of recruiting as they went. Protesters openly appealed to the sidewalk gawkers to join in and chanted, "Raise your voice/He that shouts won't die!" (It sounds better – and rhymes – in Arabic).

Even among those who didn't participate, there seemed to be a high degree of emotional support for the marchers. One chubby young mother carrying a wriggling toddler stopped to give the protesters a thumbs-up. Down the block, a grandma sporting no more than four intact teeth gleefully clapped and chanted along.

At one point, more than a thousand people stood outside a building on the Nile belonging to Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party and chanted "Illegitimate" and "Oh Mubarak, your plane is waiting for you."

The black-clad riot troops of Central Security dutifully deployed in their usual overwhelming waves. But, for the first time in recent memory, the troops seemed outnumbered by the protesters, who simply pushed through their ranks. The Central Security guys looked completely miserable. They weren't used to a fair fight.

Around 4 p.m., the crowds converged on Tahrir Square, the massive public space on the edge of downtown that's the traditional heart of the city. The protesters filled up more than half the square, but the riot police began using tear gas and water cannons. A tense stand-off lasted for hours. Around 1 a.m., police violently cleared the square using volleys of tear gas and baton

charges.

The day ended in defeat for the protesters, but the turnout had already surprised all sides and officially taken Mubarak's regime into uncharted waters. Organizers called for January 28th to be a massive "Day of Rage" protest.

January 26-27

The protests started out smaller and more manageable, and riot police succeeded in keeping demonstrators largely penned in. But, late in the evening, violent clashes erupted on Ramsis Street. Protest organizers on Twitter urged demonstrators to keep the pressure on the stressed and fatigued Interior Ministry cadres. Meanwhile, news and images emerged from the canal city of Suez where much more violent confrontations left several police stations burned and parts of the city under the control of the protesters.

The first steps of what would become a near-total communications shutdown became apparent. On the 26th, access to Twitter was blocked, but tech-savvy protesters and journalists generally found ways to access the service. Late in the evening on the 27th, the government took an unprecedented step – shutting down the country's entire internet service.

January 28

Around 10.30 in the morning, the final hand of the government fell as all coverage for cell phones in the country – including those with foreign sim cards – went dead. There were high expectations of serious violence.

Organizers, aware of the massive security deployment, simply told protesters to begin marching all over the city immediately after noon prayers. From the start, it was obvious the turnout would be beyond all previous numbers.

I joined an approximately 8,000-strong march starting from Moustafa Mahmoud mosque in Mohandessin district, across the Nile from Tahrir.

Some of the protesters came clearly primed for a fight, wearing swim goggles or carrying onions and vinegar-soaked cloths: both well-known treatments for tear-gas exposure. But the overall mood was jubilant and studiously non-violent. At one point, a single hothead protester started vandalizing a roadside McDonalds advertisement; the others quickly dragged him away, shouting "peaceful."

What was striking was just how diverse the crowds were, and how many female protesters were there. In the span of 10 minutes on the same stretch of asphalt, I interviewed a Westernized young woman in her late 20s with fluent English, an angry tubby veiled lady in her 50s, a 31-year-old executive at a multinational corporation, and an impoverished kid named Mido who makes about \$55 per month and who had to drop out of college because his family couldn't afford to have him not working.

The clashes began at the mouth of the Galaa Bridge in Dokki. Central Security had completely blocked the bridge to prevent access to Tahrir Square, directly across the river. For two hours, starting around 2 p.m., security repeatedly scattered protesters with indiscriminate volleys of tear gas that engulfed the Giza Sheraton. But the demonstrators kept coming back. Those returning from the front lines were treated with onions, vinegar and other tear-gas treatments that I had never even heard of. As I emerged gagging into a side street, a man splashed some Pepsi onto my burning eyes; it immediately alleviated the pain, and by the end of the day I was carrying a Pepsi bottle myself, tending to others.

One of the most remarkable things about the Day of Rage is that it took place inside an information vacuum. On the 25th, half the protesters seemed to be constantly on their smart phones, either Tweeting or checking for news on what was happening across the country. But on the 28th, nobody knew what was happening anywhere else – not even on the other side of the river.

It didn't matter. Protest organizers basically bypassed the idea of coordination altogether and just told people "Protest everywhere." The government's desperate move to strangle the flow of information didn't hinder the demonstrators. Nor did it stop the journalists from communicating what they witnessed to the world.

If anything, the information vacuum may have ended up sharpening the wills of the demonstrators. With no idea of the situation anywhere else, protesters had no choice but to fight like hell for whatever public patch of ground they were standing on – and then fight their way through to the next patch of ground.

All through that day and deep into the night, Cairo reverted to a word-of-mouth storyteller society. If you were walking in the street and you saw protesters coming the other direction, you asked them where they were coming from and what the situation was like there.

Around 4 p.m., something amazing happened. The phalanx of Central Security troops broke ranks and ran, leaving their paddywagons behind. For a while it was hard to even grasp what had happened. Protesters gleefully spray-painted slogans on the trucks – some of which still contained frightened Central Security guys.

It was a powerful moment – the exact turning point when the police realized the people weren't afraid of them and that they were woefully outnumbered.

There was a surreal interlude when Interior Ministry officers gathered impotently on the small bridge, while the protesters merely ignored them and surged past. I walked past one group of officers huddling around a walkie-talkie and heard one of them say, "Nobody's answering."

In an instant, the fearsome and hated bullies of the Interior Ministry had become pathetic and irrelevant. One middle-aged officer carrying a baton still hadn't figured it out. He started yelling at a group of young protesters photographing the remains of the paddywagons. One passing demonstrator simply stuck a finger in the officer's face and loudly shushed him. The officer stopped for a moment, thought it over and meekly withdrew.

By early evening, after a particularly violent battle on Kasr El Nil Bridge, the final gateway to Tahrir, the Interior Ministry had officially been defeated. Mubarak called in the army, which deployed around Tahrir and throughout the city, but the army troops made no aggressive moves against the protesters – many of whom happily climbed up on the tanks and APCs to pose for pictures.

Around midnight, Mubarak made the first of what would become a string of unsatisfactory half-concessions that completely missed the point of what the protesters were demanding. In a televised speech, he announced the dismissal of his cabinet. In Tahrir, about 10 minutes after the speech ended, most of the protesters found this hilarious. It was too ludicrous to even make them mad. As one man said: "Have you heard anybody this week shouting 'Down with the cabinet?'"

January 29-February 1

A holding pattern ensued. The protesters tightened their grip on Tahrir Square, with several thousand vowing not to leave until Mubarak departed. Supporters brought in blankets, food, medicine, tents and cigarettes. One of the most common chants became, "We're not leaving/You leave!"

Cell-phone service returned on the 29th, but the internet remained blocked.

The concessions from Mubarak continued. He appointed intelligence chief Omar Suleiman as his first-ever vice-president and ordered him to "open a dialogue" with the opposition. Given the diverse, leaderless, nature of the protests to that point, it's a valid question whether Suleiman had any idea who to even call to start that dialogue.

The collapse of the police infrastructure and a series of prison breaks sowed fear among the citizens. Neighborhood watches instantly sprang up through the city to protect their districts. On January 31st, an Army spokesman publicly stated that the soldiers would not harm peaceful protesters – a huge relief to the Tahrir demonstrators who had watched the steady buildup of tanks and concrete barricades in recent days.

On February 1st, Mubarak delivered a second speech, this time promising not to run in presidential elections scheduled for the fall, but vowing to remain in office until then. He presented it as a chance to "finish my work in the service of the nation" and head into well-earned retirement.

His latest offer was immediately rejected by the majority of protesters but gained some

traction among many Egyptians. Several people throughout the city told me they were happy to see Mubarak go, but saw no need for the former war hero to be humiliated along the way.

February 2-3

The regime played one of its final, and nastiest, cards. A series of pro-Mubarak rallies sprang up throughout the city on Wednesday, February 2nd, and gathered near Tahrir – where they abruptly coalesced into a thousands-strong mass of rock-throwing men who began laying siege to the square. The Tahrir protesters, whose ranks had thinned a bit at that point, were caught by surprise and they struggled to respond. Violent battles went on throughout the day and evening, with heavy casualties among the anti-government forces. Bizarrely, internet service returned just a few hours before the attacks, enabling the Tahrir protesters to send a barrage of frantic Tweets from the center of the maelstrom.

I made it into Tahrir around 3 p.m., and found the protesters paranoid, enraged, and a little scared. Crowds of Mubarak supporters were probing the multiple streets leading into Tahrir, seeking a soft way in; dozens of people were returning from the front lines heavily bloodied. Organizers with loudspeakers were summoning teams of young fighters to this or that intersection.

The protesters were convinced that their attackers were largely made up of plain-clothed officers from the police and State Security Investigations – basically the revenge-seeking remnants of the police state that had skulked away the previous week. They were determined not to break ranks and vigilant against the threat of infiltration by provocateurs. Everyone approaching the square was repeatedly frisked and forced to show their national ID card – which would show on the back if the holder was employed by the Interior Ministry. I watched as one man was apparently unmasked as an Interior Ministry employee; the crowd nearly killed him before others dragged them off.

The army's behavior was particularly curious. For the most part, the soldiers stood back and watched the violence, fueling doubts in the crowds as to their true intention and loyalties.

On February 3rd, the pro-Mubarak forces didn't attack Tahrir as intensely, but they secured the perimeter and blocked desperately needed food and medical supplies from entering. They also attacked just about every foreign journalist they could get their hands on. Dozens of journalists were assaulted that day by either pro-Mubarak thugs or ordinary citizens driven to paranoia by a state media that had been screaming for days about shadowy "foreign elements" stoking the protests.

I was attacked, along with several other journalists, while doing innocuous street interviews in the middle-class district of Dokki. An enraged mob punched me in the face several times, and I'm convinced it would have been much worse if a nearby army soldier hadn't intervened.

The two-day spasm of violence backfired badly on Mubarak and his henchmen. It prompted an angry escalation in the language coming out of the Obama administration. What was worse, for Mubarak, it failed to dislodge the protesters from Tahrir, and only sharpened the demonstrators' resolve. By Friday, February 4th, the thug squads had disappeared just as suddenly as they formed and massive crowds were streaming in to reinforce the beleaguered Tahrir hardcores.

February 4-10

The golden age of the Republic of Tahrir. Somewhere along the line, protester-held Tahrir Square became a heavily fortified mini-state. Protesters of widely divergent political views and social circumstances combined to create something truly unique. They organized divisions of labor, arranged their own security details and diligently cleaned up after themselves. I entered the square more than a dozen times, and every single time it was cleaner than the street outside my apartment in Giza has ever been.

Every day seemingly revealed new (invariably funny) chants and fresh details. Multiple stages were assembled for concerts, speeches and poetry readings; tent cities mushroomed. Somebody set up a pair of wireless internet networks called Revolution 1 and Revolution 2.

Just getting into Tahrir required running a gauntlet of multiple redundant ID checks and pat-downs by volunteer security wearing their own laminated badges on lanyards around their necks. I have never been searched so often, so thoroughly or so politely. During that final

week, Tahrir Square was more secure than most international airports. The buoyant mood had also returned, after a traumatic and violent two days. Once you made it through all the security procedures, you were greeted by a clapping and cheering crowd welcoming you to “liberated ground.”

The protesters had survived – just barely by many accounts – a harrowing experience and emerged battered but on their feet. There was a feeling that the regime had played one of its few remaining cards and failed. They knew at this point that (barring some sort of Army-led massacre) it was just a matter of time.

On the night of February 7th, there came an iconic revolutionary moment. Wael Ghonim, one of the secret planners of the revolt, was released after spending 12 days in detention. A Dubai-based executive for Google, Ghonim had anonymously created the Facebook page “We are all Khaled Saieed” in honor of a notorious victim of police brutality. He had come from Dubai to take part in the first demonstrations, but disappeared into the bowels of the police state on January 28th.

Just hours after his release, Ghonim appeared on a popular satellite talk show on the independent channel Dream TV. His raw, painfully sincere performance mesmerized the country.

“We are not traitors,” he declared. “We did this because we love Egypt.”

Ghonim, 31, wept openly when informed of the estimated 300 protesters – mostly young people – who had been killed. “It’s not our fault,” he sobbed before abruptly leaving the studio. “It’s the fault of all those who are clinging to power.”

Ghonim’s interview was particularly crucial because, for many Egyptians, it represented the first real mainstreaming of the protesters’ message. And their true face. My elderly Egyptian aunts, for example, generally don’t read anything but the state-run *Al-Ahram* newspaper. But they all watch Dream TV.

February 10

A flurry of early evening developments stoked anticipation that this would be the night that Mubarak would finally surrender and announce his immediate resignation. State television announced that Mubarak would address the nation at 10 o’clock, and several respectable news outlets reported that Mubarak would resign.

Tens of thousands of deliriously happy protesters gathered to watch the speech on a projection screen in Tahrir. They would all be disappointed.

Mubarak delivered a long, whiney, recap of his achievements in the service of the nation, and vowed once again to stay in command until his term finished. In short, he offered absolutely nothing new.

As the president’s speech went on and he failed to say the magic sentence everyone was waiting for, a sense of stunned realization settled over the crowd. Even the dozen soldiers clustered on top of a nearby tank watching the speech seemed grim.

About halfway through Mubarak’s message, One guy yelled out: “Does that look like someone who’s leaving? He won’t go until he’s removed. So we’ll remove him!”

The mood in the immediate aftermath of Mubarak’s speech was difficult to define – equal parts deflation, determination, and a mounting sense of pure rage.

“I feel hatred. I feel like we need to drag him from his palace,” said Mayada Moursi, a schoolteacher in her early 30s.

Twenty-five-year-old Mahmoud Ahmed, simply shrugged and said: “I feel like our president is stupid.”

February 11

Enraged and inspired by Mubarak’s enduring stubbornness, the protesters staked out new ground. One group moved to surround the Information Ministry a short distance from Tahrir –

home of the state-run television channels. A second group of protesters made the several-mile trek to the presidential palace in the outlying district of Heliopolis. The army surrounded and secured each building, but made no move to disperse any of the protesters.

Finally, around 6 p.m., a grim vice-president Suleiman read a terse statement on state television. Mubarak had resigned and left power to the Supreme Armed Forces Council.

It was over.

ONE OF THE SAD FACTS of Mubarak's final two weeks in power is that many of the concessions he offered under duress might have saved his regime and legacy, if only he had done so sincerely and years earlier. But by the time he was forced to deal honestly with his people, nobody trusted him anymore – and with good reason.

Mubarak had a chance to go out with grace, having genuinely placed the country on a road to true democracy.

Instead, his final years were marked by a regression so obvious that it was as though Mubarak and his government had stopped even trying to disguise it. Two of the most shameful moments of the Mubarak era came within its last year: the murder of Khaled Saieed in June 2010 and the ludicrous parliamentary elections in November.

Saieed, a 28-year-old small-time businessman in Alexandria, was dragged from a neighborhood internet café and assaulted by two plain-clothed police officers. The motivations for the attack are still murky, but Saieed's family and friends claimed at the time it was because he posted a video online showing police officers dividing up the spoils of a recent drug bust.

Watching the video in question, you come away with more questions than answers. It definitely depicted a group of senior police officers jovially congratulating each other in front of a desk loaded with large bricks of hashish. Bizarrely, they all seem aware they are being filmed by what appears to be a cell-phone camera. But just why the officers allowed themselves to be filmed or how such damning footage ended up in the hands of Saieed remains unclear.

Whatever the motivations, the known facts of the Saieed case are this: on June 6th, just days after Saieed posted the video, he was forcibly dragged from the internet café and brutally beaten in front of multiple witnesses. He died from his injuries and images of his badly mangled face rocketed around the Egyptian internet, while several witnesses spoke out to the country's independent press.

The ensuing furor touched off weeks of demonstrations around the country. That public anger was only magnified by a pair of shameful coroner's reports that blindly backed the police claim that Saieed had choked to death on a packet of drugs he swallowed when he saw the officers coming.

In sweeping the Saieed issue under the carpet, Mubarak's government helped lay the seeds for its own demise. Ghonim's "We Are All Khaled Saieed" Facebook page became one of the main gathering points for organizers of the protests that eventually brought Mubarak down.

The incident also helped politicize untold numbers of Egyptians, touching a deep and powerful societal nerve and resonating among ordinary citizens who probably had never considered attending a demonstration before.

In late June, I attended a protest in Saieed's name in Alexandria against police brutality. When I pulled out my notebook and identified myself as a reporter, I was literally engulfed by people clamoring to tell me their own personal tales of injustice and mistreatment at the hands of the police. I could have written down a dozen examples, ranging from harassment and intimidation of political activists to Mafia-style shakedowns and casual everyday humiliations.

Last month in Tahrir square, I met Amal, a young affluent mother who admitted she never cared about politics until the Khaled Saieed case.

"That really got to me. I have two boys and I felt he could be one of my sons," she said. "That

was a big turning point here.”

Just months after Saieed’s death came the November 2010 parliamentary elections, providing yet another glaring public reminder that the needs and desires of the people were irrelevant to Mubarak’s government.

After months of angrily insisting to the world that Egypt could conduct free and fair elections, Mubarak presided over one of the most widely decried votes in the nation’s modern history.

Paid civil servants were bussed in en-masse to vote for NDP candidates. Local election monitors and representatives of non-government candidates were barred from entering polling stations. In electoral districts across the country, the ballot boxes themselves were in the sole hands of the security forces – essentially making them the property of the NDP.

The final results were borderline comical and an international PR disaster for the NDP. No opposition party, even those regarded as close to the regime, secured more than a handful of seats. The powerful Muslim Brotherhood, which captured 88 seats (20 per cent of the People’s Assembly) in the 2005 elections somehow magically dropped to zero in the space of five years.

It was, for many Egyptians, the last straw – final, definitive, proof that this government was incapable of ever reforming itself. Mubarak’s legacy will be of a leader who cared so little about his people’s feelings that he felt safe actually showing them the game was rigged and daring them to do something about it.

Other authoritarian regimes are no doubt studying the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions for notes on how to better manage their people and avoid the fates of Mubarak and Ben Ali. But that approach will miss the true message of what happened here.

The real way to stay in power in the new Middle East is much simpler: Behave yourself, don’t get too comfortable and stop treating your citizens with contempt. Over the past month of interviewing protesters, I heard just as many calls for basic dignity and respect as for fuzzier concepts like freedom and democracy. Mubarak and his regime didn’t just take away his people’s freedom; he took their dignity. But the people, in the end, forcefully took it back – robbing Mubarak of his along the way.



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