

People Power in Egypt: Defusing a Revolution?

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People power is the dynamic driver of social history, with history merely being the documented response of elite power-brokers to popular demands for justice. As one might expect, in conventional history books, the full extent of the people's power is conveniently excluded from narratives of social change, leaving us with the "great man" version of history -- which has the unfortunate effect of undermining peoples' belief in their own immense power to write history.¹ Nevertheless as humans the world over have demonstrated, such counterrevolutionary tactics cannot contain popular insurrections indefinitely. Thus, in recognition of the latent power and desire of normal people to overthrow their oppressive rulers, more far sighted elites have long recognized the need to channel such unrealized power into non-revolutionary political alternatives: a process which entails their intervening at the grassroots level of civil society to ensure that such threats never coalesce into a force powerful enough to upset the capitalist status quo.²

Exporting the Non-profit Industrial Complex

In the United States, one could argue that people power has been fairly successfully defused -- for the time being anyway -- by conservative elites, masquerading as liberals, who have sought to work in harmony with their class enemies by funding their activism.³ In this way, US elites have created what many authors have referred to as a non-profit industrial complex; a loose coalition which can be seen as "a set of symbiotic relationships that link political and financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements." This non-profit industrial complex forms a "natural corollary" to the prison industrial complex. Indeed, the non-profit side of the political equation complements the state's overt repression, "manag[ing] and control[ing] dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus, functioning as a 'shadow state' constituted by a network of institutions that do much of what government agencies are supposed to do with tax money in the areas of education and social services."⁴ It is important to add that this shadow state also works hand-in-hand with the corporate media to undermine cooperative action through an ongoing propaganda

¹ This "great man" theory of social change applies as much to world leaders like Hitler or Stalin, as it does to the so-called "great men" of peace, think Gandhi or Martin Luther King. For an antidote to such an elitist view of social change, see Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (Harper, 2003 [1980]).

² A vital element in any such co-optive attempts to defuse people power is the selective application of state violence to those defiant citizens who resist such cooptation.

³ A good example of such co-optation in the United States can be seen through a critical reflection on the history of the civil rights movement, see Michael Barker, "[Elite Philanthropy, SNCC, and the Civil Rights Movement](#)," *Swans Commentary*, November 1, 2010.

⁴ Andrea Smith, "Introduction: The Revolution Will Not Be Funded," in: INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (eds.) *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond The Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (South End Press, 2007), pp.8-9.

offensive for the public's mind.

Of course, such *technologies of repression* also play a central role in guiding imperialism; and while their role is largely ignored by most writers (even radical ones), their importance has nevertheless been thoroughly documented. For a good example, see Edward Berman's seminal book [The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy: The Ideology of Philanthropy](#) (State University of New York Press, 1983). As Berman explains, especially in the post-World War II era, "the major foundations increasingly supported educational institutions in strategic geopolitical locales in the hopes that these would educate individuals who viewed the United States national interests in ways similar to those held by their foundation sponsors and who would also help to structure a world amenable to these interests."⁵ In this respect, the Council on Foreign Relations, more than any other think-tank, with foundation support worked to set the parameters which defined these "American" interests; and in 1939, the Council launched a secret project in collaboration with the US State Department, later known as the War and Peace Studies Group, that aimed to develop a concrete plan for US domination in the post-war world.

Yet remarkably, until power elite researcher G. William Domhoff briefly wrote about the activities of the Council in his book, *Who Rules America?* (Prentice-Hall, 1967), it appears that no one on the Left had critically analysed its work. Furthermore, until recently the only critical book-length study of the Council's work was Laurence Shoup and William Minter's excellent *Imperial Brain Trust: The Council on Foreign Relations and United States Foreign Policy* (Monthly Review Press, 1977). This study, which highlighted the close connections that existed between the Council on Foreign Relations and the US government intelligence apparatus, pointed out that since its founding, the "directorship of the CIA has been in the hands of a Council leader or member more often than not..."⁶

And so it is in the light of the manipulative history of such "democracy promoting" organizations that we should view the ongoing imperial interventions into Egyptian civil society.

"Promoting Democracy" in Egypt

Although Mubarak's US-backed dictatorship has been immensely profitable to the West, this has not precluded US elites from planning on the means of

⁵Edward Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy: The Ideology of Philanthropy* (State University of New York Press, 1983), p.12.

⁶ Laurence Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust: The Council on Foreign Relations and United States Foreign Policy* (Monthly Review Press, 1977), p.61. After the successful War and Peace Studies, the next time that the Council would convene a group to study the entire international system was in 1973, when the 1980s Project was initiated "to plan for and create the current neoliberal world system we now have." See Laurence Shoup, "[Behind the Bipartisan Drive Toward War: The Council on Foreign Relations and the U.S. Invasion of Iraq](#)," *Z Magazine*, March 1, 2003. For a detailed examination of the 1980s Project, see Shoup and Minter, 1977, pp.254-84. Since *Imperial Brain Trust* was published in 1977 the only book-length critique of the Council has been Indedjeet Parmar's *Think Tanks and Power in Foreign Policy: A Comparative Study of the Role and Influence of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1939-1945* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

ensuring his ouster to lay the groundwork for a transition to a US-managed "democracy." Therefore to understand what is happening in Egypt at the moment, it is imperative to reconcile the conflicting approaches to managing social change that inform imperial decision making in the region.

Most importantly, it is critical to note that imperial efforts to shape the Egyptian polity are far more subtle than many progressive scholars would give the US credit for. It is well known that Egypt is the second-largest recipient of US military aid (after Israel), but this fact should not prevent critics from acknowledging the significance of the US government's other (non-militaristic) interventions in Egypt. Ruling class policy wonks are dangerous; however, they are certainly not stupid. Such servile scholars are handsomely rewarded to manage the never-ending threats that capitalism creates for itself, and they are well aware that while dictatorships may be a convenient way of liquidating oppositional forces (in the short term), they are not a useful means of sustainably protecting geostrategic interests and capitalist investment opportunities in the long term. The "promotion of democracy" is thus seen as a practical way to ensure the longevity of oppressive foreign policy priorities, which in the case of Egypt are first and foremost connected to the US government's political commitment to the defence of Israel.⁷

Here it is important to emphasize that external support for the Egyptian military-industrial complex differs vastly from the nature of external support granted to pro-democracy and human rights activists. So while billions of dollars of military aid ensures that the US largely controls the Egyptian military, the same is not true when millions of dollars are dispersed for managing social change in the civil realm. The primary difference is that military aid is used to exert direct influence on the actions of a limited segment of an already compliant ruling class, while political aid used to "promote democracy" is more diffuse in its effects, as it attempts to indirectly manipulate the highly unpredictable oppressed and dissenting classes -- that is tens of millions of people with no particular vested interest in the status quo. Thus any efforts to manage such huge swathes of humans always have the potential to threaten the continuity of elite domination with a potentially revolutionary situation. These are risks that have always made less thoughtful members of the ruling class uncomfortable with the "democracy promoting" establishment, especially those parts of it who are committed to utilizing the power of popular insurrections to force their agendas.

Most political commentators would concur that institutionalized oppression, like that most visibly present under US-backed dictatorships, necessarily leads to rising popular anger, and eventually to popular uprisings. If nothing is done to (mis)direct this dissent, isolated incoherent expressions of outrage can easily progress to organized demands for popular and meaningful forms of democratic governance -- by the people, for the people. Such progressive developments are anathema to imperial elites, and consequently, vast amounts of intellectual capital has been devoted to developing the means to

⁷ Alison Weir, "Egypt, the US and the Israel Lobby: Critical Connections," CounterPunch, February 4 - 6, 2011. <http://www.counterpunch.org/weir02042011.html>

hijack popular discontent, so that it can be safely channeled into situations that promote low, rather than high-intensity democracy. As William I. Robinson points out in his excellent examination of this subject, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge University Press, 1996):

All over the world, the United States is now promoting its version of "democracy" as a way to relieve pressure from subordinate groups for more fundamental political, social and economic change. The impulse to "promote democracy" is the rearrangement of political systems in the peripheral and semi-peripheral zones of the "world system" so as to secure the underlying objective of maintaining essentially undemocratic societies inserted into an unjust international system. The promotion of "low-intensity democracy" is aimed not only at mitigating the social and political tensions produced by elite-based and undemocratic status quos, but also at suppressing popular and mass aspirations for more thoroughgoing democratization of social life in the twenty-first century international order. Polyarchy is a structural feature of the emergent global society. Just as "client regimes" and right-wing dictatorships installed into power or supported by the United States were characteristic of a whole era of US foreign policy and intervention abroad in the post-World War II period, promoting "low-intensity democracies" in the Third World is emerging as a cornerstone of a new era in US foreign policy.⁸

Efforts to "promote democracy" in foreign states should not however be seen as a replacement of traditional diplomatic, economic and military forms of statecraft, but instead they should be merely seen as supplemental measures (albeit important ones). Such "democratic" inventions combine relentless propaganda offensives (directed from without and within) with strategically dispersed political aid: aid which is provided to friendly political organizations, and in some instances is used to help local actors create new political bodies. Such "democracy promotion" activities are undertaken by all Western governments, but in the United States they are coordinated by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) -- a group that was created in 1983 within "the highest echelons of the US national security state, as part of the same project that led to the illegal operations of the Iran-Contra scandal." It should

⁸ William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.6. "The state is not simply 'negative and repressive,' but also 'positive and educative,' encompassing repressive organs such as the military and police, but also legislatures and educational systems. The state unites with the 'trenches of civil society' to organize and structure interests in accordance with the preservation of social order.

"This is relevant to 'democracy promotion' on two accounts. First, ... the understanding on the part of US policymakers that power ultimately rests in civil society, and that state power is intimately linked to a given correlation of forces in civil society, has helped shape the contours of the new political intervention. Unlike earlier US interventionism, the new intervention focuses much more intensely on civil society itself, in contrast to formal government structures, in intervened countries. The purpose of 'democracy promotion' is not to suppress but to penetrate and conquer civil society in intervened countries, that is, the complex of "private" organizations such as political parties, trade unions, the media, and so forth, and *from therein*, integrate subordinate classes and national groups into a hegemonic transnational social order.... This function of civil society as an arena for exercising domination runs counter to conventional (particularly pluralist) thinking on the matter, which holds that civil society is a buffer between state domination and groups in society, and that class and group domination is diluted as civil society develops." (pp.28-9)

come as no surprise, that: "In structure, organization, and operation, it is closer to clandestine and national security organs such as the CIA than apolitical or humanitarian endowments as its name would suggest."⁹

A "fundamental principle" allegedly guiding the work of the NED -- according to their 2007 Strategy Report -- is that: "Democracy assistance is not an exercise in top-down social engineering." However, the honesty of this guiding principle is a little far-fetched given that the NED selects, supports, and sometimes helps create nongovernmental organizations operating in foreign countries, a process that could be perfectly well described as social engineering. To make things clearer, the NED's final fundamental principle states that: "In carrying out its mission of promoting democracy, NED advances the American national interest and embodies America's highest ideals."¹⁰ Thus we might say that the NED exports the US's special brand of neoliberal "democracy" by engaging in foreign social engineering, and so its activities might better be described as those of an imperial democracy manipulator.

The current chair of the NED's board of directors, Richard Gephardt, is the former chairman of the Progressive Policy Institute, "a Democratic Party-aligned policy shop that promotes a 'liberal hawk' line on foreign affairs similar in many respects to that pushed by neoconservatives."¹¹ Thus it is perhaps fitting that his predecessor at the helm of the NED was Vin Weber (who is now just a regular board member), an individual who was a member of the neoconservative Project for a New American Century (PNAC), and in the lead-up to the war -- rather, illegal destruction wrought -- on Iraq, played a key role in a PNAC subsidiary, a group called Americans for Victory Over Terrorism. Next up, the vice-chair of the NED's board is the right-wing economist Judy Shelton, while their president (since 1984) has been Carl Gershman, an individual who formerly served as the executive director of the right-wing Social Democrats USA,¹² and as an aide to the famous neoconservative Jeane Kirkpatrick.

Needless to say, the US mainstream media rarely draws attention to the NED's democracy manipulating activities, despite the fact that the NED has played an integral part in their government's foreign policy apparatus since its birth in 1983. But critical insights have occasionally graced the pages of the mainstream media, and one rare instance occurred in 1991 when *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius reported, in a generally celebratory article, that the NED's first acting president admitted that "A lot of what we [the NED] do

⁹ Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, p.89.

¹⁰ National Endowment for Democracy, "[Strategy Document: January 2007](#)." (pdf)

¹¹ RightWeb profile, "[Progressive Policy Institute](#)," Last updated January 13, 2011.

¹² According to Beth Sims, Social Democrats USA (SD/USA) is a "small, self-described social democratic organization" whose "policies and activities dovetail smartly with U.S. interventionism abroad, and its leaders dominate the foreign policy apparatus of the AFL-CIO. Largely composed of ex-Trotskyites, the organization is a rightwing breakaway faction from the U.S. Socialist Party, which split over conceptions of the proper role for the United States to play in Vietnam. Through the strategic placement of members such as Carl Gershman and Tom Kahn, SD/USA has exercised a profound influence in the export of anticommunist ideology and U.S. influence under the guise of promoting democracy. But as one top union staffer explained, the organization is 'not only anticommunist, but anti-left,' a fact that strictly limits its alliances around the world." Beth Sims, *Workers of the World Undermined: American Labor's Role in U.S. Foreign Policy* (South End Press, 1992), pp.46-7.

today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA."¹³ Ignatius adds: "The biggest difference is that when such activities are done overtly, the flap potential is close to zero. Openness is its own protection."

NED support for US-friendly groups and individuals, however, goes way beyond support for free-markets policies and basic liberal-democratic reforms, as it also entails providing support to grassroots activists to help catalyse overthrow movements; a controversial subject that this article explores in more detail. However, before doing so it is fitting to note that Peter Ackerman -- a key "democracy promoter" whose work will be now be examined -- recently served alongside David Ignatius on the board of directors of the US branch of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, an organization which describes itself as "the primary source of accurate, objective information on international strategic issues for politicians and diplomats, foreign affairs analysts, international business, economists, the military, defence commentators, journalists, academics and the informed public."¹⁴

A Revolution in Nonviolent Warfare

Given the US government's "democracy promoting" establishment's catalogue of successful interventions over the past three decades, in more recent years it appears that this "democratic" community has become bolder in their efforts to overthrow foreign governments. In fact, as illustrated in the case of "colour revolutions" in Eastern Europe, "democracy promoters" have become increasingly confident at supporting popular nonviolent uprisings to oust US-unfriendly governments. "Revolutions" which began in Serbia (in 2000), and then spread like wildfire through Georgia (2003), the Ukraine (2005), and Kyrgyzstan (2005).¹⁵

One group in particular that is "integral to the[se] new ['democratic'] modalities of intervention" is the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict -- an organization which has been funded and created by the investment banker/theorist of nonviolence, Peter Ackerman. Indeed, the specifically activist orientation of Ackerman's Center means it is perfectly positioned to help "penetrate [any given] mass popular/resistance movement (e.g., through meetings, financing, grooming some leaders and marginalizing others, trying to shape the movement's discourse, etc.), in order to keep it from radicalizing out of control into a genuinely revolutionary movement able to threaten the whole elite order."¹⁶

In the case of the Orwellian-named International Center for Nonviolent

¹³ David Ignatius, "[Innocence Abroad: The New World of Spyleless Coups](#)," *Washington Post*, September 22, 1991. For a detailed critique of mainstream reporting on the activities of the NED, see Michael Barker, "[The New York Times 'Reports' on the National Endowment for Democracy](#)," Swans Commentary, October 20, 2008.

¹⁴ David Ignatius also recently served on the board of trustees of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, where he sat alongside the likes of Suzanne Woolsey (the wife of the former Director of the CIA).

¹⁵ Michael Barker, "[Taking the Risk out of Civil Society: Harnessing Social Movements and Regulating Revolutions](#)," (pdf) Refereed paper presented to the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Newcastle 25-27 September 2006.

¹⁶ William I. Robinson cited in Michael Barker, "[Failure of Progressive Thought](#)," *Swans Commentary*, December 14, 2009.

Conflict, their mission -- as defined by their founder and Council on Foreign Relations board member, Peter Ackerman -- is to motivate nonviolent popular uprisings, preferably at politically convenient times, by encouraging social movement organizers to view nonviolent uprisings as the soul arbiter of the success of any given popular movement. Their deliberate and selective misreading of history necessarily means that they exclude from their analyses the often important role of violence (real or threatened) in precipitating change; the support of foreign elites for regime change; and any critical discussion of the repressive nature of the low-intensity democracies that are often brought about by their much lauded people power movements. Likewise one rarely learns about the critically important role fulfilled by social movement unions -- as witnessed by events in Brazil, the Philippines, South Africa and South Korea -- in helping to overthrow dictatorships.¹⁷

A good example here, given its similarities to the ouster of Mubarak in Egypt, is the 1986 ouster of Ferdinand Marcos -- the long serving US-backed dictator of the Philippines. This historical example is particularly relevant given the regularity with which it is cited as a "success story" for nonviolence by Ackerman and his friends at the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC). By the early 1980s, the US government was well aware that an increasingly powerful people power movement was gaining momentum, presenting a growing threat to President Marcos' grasp on power. This movement was composed of a broad array of forces which included thousands of armed revolutionaries (in the New People's Army), a hugely popular union movement led by the militant social movement unions of the Kilusang Mayo Uno Labor Center (KMU-May First Movement), and the mass, left-of-center civic movement, BAYAN.

Thus in response to this threat of Filipino popular power being translated into state power, the US "democracy promoting" community strove to protect their geostrategic interests in the regions (most notably their military bases). They did this by ensuring that the people power movement was weakened in such a manner that the ouster of Marcos did not lead to a genuine improvement for Filipino people, but instead led to the imposition of a transition to a highly repressive low-intensity democracy. Such "democratic" activities were coordinated by the NED, which then provided millions of dollars of support for US-friendly civic groups, and reactionary unions like the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines. The US State Department also ensured that a trusted oligarch would be in position to replace Marcos, and this individual was soon-to-be president, Cory Aquino.¹⁸ Referring specifically to the post-Marcos political landscape, Alfred McCoy writes how:

In coping with the legitimation crisis that roiled the democratic transition, President Aquino refused to expand "the scope of participation" and

¹⁷For a theoretical understanding of social movement unionism, see Kim Scipes, "[Social Movement Unionism and the Kilusang Mayo Uno](#)," (pdf) *Kasarinlan* [Third World Studies Center, University of the Philippines], Vol.7, Nos. 2-3 (4th Qtr. 1991-1st Qtr. 1992), pp.121-162.

¹⁸ For a very detailed discussion of how Aquino's government regained control of the people power movement, from the perspective of the militant wing of the labor movement, see Kim Scipes, *KMU: Building Genuine Trade Unionism in the Philippines, 1980-1994* (New Day Publishers, 1996) chapter 2.

instead relied on the powerful security services for repression. Like her predecessors [Rogelio] Roxas and Marcos, Aquino would use the state's internal security forces to crush dissent, exempting her from any need for concession or compromise with the poor and middle class. ... After abandoning peace talks with the New People's Army, her administration first tried to defeat the insurgency with military force. When conventional tactics failed, she sanctioned secret operations and vigilante violence. ... In this turn to repression, Aquino enjoyed the full backing of U.S. military advisers, who were rearmed, in the post-Vietnam era, with a new counterinsurgency doctrine called low-intensity conflict (LIC) that they were eager to test under actual combat conditions. During this period of democratic transition when social reform became possible for the first time in a generation, Washington again lent its power to suppressing the signs of social unrest, redoubling the state's repressive capacity and reinforcing its ruling oligarchy.¹⁹

Timing is of course integral to the success of any popular insurrection. And if foreign "democracy promoters" could only achieve one goal by intervening in protest movements, succeeding in influencing the launching point for any given uprising would be of vital importance. Indeed, in his timeless novel, *The Iron Heel* (1907), Jack London told a cautionary story of how, when an increasingly powerful revolutionary movement was on the brink of launching "a sudden colossal, stunning blow" to the entire North American Oligarchy, the Oligarchy caught wind of what they planned and preempted them. That is, the Oligarchy "deliberately manufactured" the social conditions that would precipitate an isolated and containable revolutionary uprising which could be destroyed on their own terms.

Again it is critical to emphasize that foreign elites *cannot* control popular uprisings; they can only seek to influence them, and try to channel them in directions that work to undermine genuine displays of people power. Essentially such "democracy promoting" ventures' primary aim is predicting when and where such popular upsurges might emerge, and then setting up allies and organizations in advance, so that, if and when, the shit hits the fan, foreign policy elites can intervene in the most advantageous way to help the Empire. In the case of Egypt, these elites are currently attempting to channel the Egyptian people's righteous anger in a direction that will eventually facilitate the progression from a military dictatorship to a low-intensity liberal democracy -- albeit one heavily reliant upon a US-backed military. Such foreign interventions are highly unpredictable, and it is very likely that the current uprising will escalate and soon become a genuinely revolutionary movement. However in order to catalyze such a revolutionary situation, it is important to understand the role that the US government may have played in influencing the current people's movement. It is for this reason that this article has been written, in the hope that it will help Egyptian activists committed to revolutionary social change to see how they can distance themselves from the multitude of actors entwined with the US government's "democracy promotion"

¹⁹ Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2009) , p.434.

apparatus.

Arabic Comics, the American Islamic Congress, and Neoconservatives?

There are a number of individuals who keep showing up in the same foreign policy-related social networks over and over again, and it's important to draw out these relationships to help understand the whole network, and how each fits into it. A good place to begin with is a group known as the American Islamic Congress, an organization described by one of the ICNC's pacifist friends (David Finke) as a non-profit dedicated to "[promot\[ing\] peace](#) and civil rights throughout the Arabic world." Finke's article points out how a few years ago the Egyptian representative for the American Islamic Congress, Dalia Ziada, organized a project for the Congress that involved translating the comic book *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story* (Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1958) into Arabic (and later into Farsi). Since then Ziada has been busy distributing this comic -- which presents a grossly simplified view of the power of nonviolence -- around Egypt, and "amid the throngs of protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square..."²⁰ At first glance, this all sounds fairly innocuous, but it is important to recognize that the American Islamic Congress is hardly a peace group by any progressive standards.

Thus if one looks beneath the thin veneer of progressive rhetoric surrounding the American Islamic Congress, the first thing that strikes a critical observer is that their nine person board of directors is packed with neoconservatives. Take for example Project for a New American Century signatory Hillel Fradkin, or M. Zuhi Jasser, who is the founder of the right-wing lobby group, American Islamic Forum for Democracy, and serves as an advisor to the Zionist front organization Clarion Fund, which distinguishes itself through its avid promotion of anti-Islamic viewpoints.²¹ Likewise, another American Islamic Congress board member, Khaleel Mohammed, has an equally dubious background, having previously served on the advisory council of the International Intelligence Summit, a conference that describes itself as a "neutral forum" that brings "together intelligence agencies of the free world and the emerging democracies." While even the widely celebrated Egyptian pro-democracy activist and board member of the American Islamic Congress, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, maintains intimate connections to US neoconservatives and is the founder of the NED-funded Ibn Khaldoun Center. Recently Ibrahim even joined the advisory board of a neoconservative group called Cyberdissidents.org, whose web site says they are "dedicated to supporting human liberty by

²⁰ Sylvia Rhor, "Comic Heroes of the Egyptian Revolution," Pittsburgh Post Gazette, February 20, 2011.

Another person who with the aid of the NED has been spreading nonviolent literature in Egypt is the now US-based Supreme Court lawyer, Omar Afifi Soliman (who is a former police officer from Egypt). Between 2008 and 2009, he served as a research fellow at the NED's International Forum for Democratic Studies, and in early 2009 he "created a TV series and wrote a handbook in colloquial Arabic, entitled *How Not To Be Slapped on the Back of Your Neck*, to teach Egyptians about their civil rights." "These products," Soliman adds, "became an overnight success: the book, in particular, sold 50,000 copies in two weeks before being banned by the government." Later in the year, his organization Hukuk Elnas (People's Rights) was awarded a NED grant to establish a legal aid clinic in Cairo. (For further details, see "[Reagan-Fascist Democracy Fellows Newsletter 2008-2009](#)," p.19.)

²¹ Pam Martens, "[Koch Footprints Lead to Political Powder Keg: The Far Right's Secret Slush Fund to Keep Fear Alive](#)", *Counterpunch*, October 26, 2010.

promoting the voices of online dissidents." Founded in 2008 this project is headed by their cofounder, David Keyes, who previously served as coordinator for democracy programs under the right-wing Zionist Natan Sharansky while based at the Adelson Institute for Strategic Studies.²²

The two aforementioned American Islamic Congress board members Khaleel Mohammed and M. Zuhi Jasser are also cofounders of the neoconservative think tank, the Center for Islamic Pluralism. Another notable cofounder of this Center is Egyptian national Ahmed Subhy Mansour, who is a former visiting fellow at the NED, and "has been deeply involved in efforts to reform religious education to foster human rights and promote tolerance, in conjunction" with Saad Eddin Ibrahim's Ibn Khaldoun Center.

The neoconservative connections do not end with their board of directors. The founder of the American Islamic Congress, Zainab Al-Suwaij, is the cofounder of another dubious outfit known as Women for a Free Iraq, which was launched in 2003 with support from the neoconservative Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and a dozen Iraqi-American groups in January 2003 with a meeting at the White House with Vice President Dick Cheney.²³ Furthermore, on top of heading up these "democracy promoting" groups, Al-Suwaij is a dedicated conflict "resolver," having not only "provided sensitivity training to [US] soldiers deploying to Middle East,"²⁴ but also acting as a board member of the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution (based at George Mason University) -- a Center's whose board is chaired by Joseph Montville, the former director of preventive diplomacy at the neoliberal Center for Strategic and International Studies. Joseph Montville in turn is a former board member of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy -- a group's whose former executive director, Abdulwahab Alkebsi, is now the program director for the Middle East and North Africa at the National Endowment for Democracy. American Islamic Congress board member Saad Eddin Ibrahim is also a current board member of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, and their board chair, Asma Afsaruddin, serves on the advisory board of the Iraqi Women's Educational Institute -- which is a joint project of the American Islamic Congress, the Foundation for the Defense of

²² For a critical examination of Ibrahim's background, see Michael Barker, "[The Violence of Nonviolence](#)," *State of Nature*, Spring 2010.

²³ With regard funding, the American Islamic Congress' web site notes that: "Our campaigns have received grants from foundations across the spectrum, including the United States Institute of Peace, Working Assets, the Cato Institute, and the Bradley Foundation." The Cato Institute is a well-known conservative libertarian think tank closely linked to the late Friedrich Hayek's Mont Pelerin Society; while the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation's board of directors is headed by Thomas Rhodes, who is the current president of the neoconservative magazine *National Review*. Likewise, the US Institute of Peace, is an Orwellian organization whose "peace" research is guided by leading members of the military-industrial complex, see Richard Hatch and Sara Diamond, "Operation Peace Institute," *Z Magazine*, July/Aug 1990. <http://www.zcommunications.org/operation-peace-institute-by-site-administrator> Finally, the only left-leaning funder mentioned by the American Islamic Congress is Working Assets, which is now known as CREDO -- a group which counts Drummond Pike among its cofounders, an individual who just so happens to be a good friend of George Soros. Soros is considered to be a key private investor within the "democracy promoting" establishment and many groups that received support from the NED also received aid from his own private foundations: a good example in Egypt is the Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-violence Studies which is headed by Ahmed Samih Farag, an activist who also serves on the advisory council of the World Youth Movement for Democracy -- which is a spin-off project from the NED-initiated World Movement for Democracy.

²⁴ Annon, "American Islamic Congress Director - Who Trained Troops at Fort Hood - Condemns Attack and Offers Condolences to Families," *PR Newswire*, November 7, 2009.

Democracies, and the anti-feminist Independent Women's Forum (a notable emeriti director is Dick Cheney's wife).

Insurrections and Imperial Interference: Beyond the Bloggo-sphere

This rarely mentioned background material on the American Islamic Congress throws more than a few concerns upon the reasons why Dalia Ziada was distributing comics in Tahrir Square earlier this month. So to clear matters up it makes sense to briefly review Ziada's own activist background, and to do so we can draw upon her online biography, as listed on her blog (<http://daliaziada.blogspot.com>). Here Ziada describes herself as a "Egyptian liberal human rights activist" who is "studying for MA Degree in International Relations from Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University." (Note: the chair of the Fletcher School's board of overseers is Peter Ackerman.) Backtracking a little, she notes that in 2005 she worked as a "translator and researcher" for the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI). She adds that by the end of 2006, her friend and activist blogger Karim Amer was jailed, and so she then "co-launched an international campaign to defend his right to freedom of expression..." Subsequently, in July 2007, she "quit ANHRI to found the Cairo office of the American Islamic Congress"; and in addition to this work, Ziada "facilitate[s] work for international NGOs (e.g. Avaaz.org, and others) in Egypt and the Middle East." She also highlights that fact that some of her political poetry has been published on the web site of a group known as Mideast Youth.

To begin with it is useful to examine who exactly Mideast Youth are, especially given that they were the founders of the aforementioned international campaign that Ziada colaunched, which is better known as Free Karim! (<http://www.freekarim.org>). Mideast Youth is run by Esra'a al-Shafei, a blogger from Bahrain, who in June 2007, received an award from pro free-market Atlas Economic Research Foundation, and since then has received numerous other accolades from US elites. Mideast Youth describe the wide array of internet campaigns they support as "mainly promot[ing] freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and the free flow of information"; with projects ranging from the Muslim network for Baha'i rights, to the Israeli-linked campaign group Darfur Awareness.²⁵

The focus of one of Mideast Youth's campaigns, Egyptian blogger Karim Amer, was eventually released from prison in November 2010. He was detained again by the state in early February 2011 and, according to Dalia Ziada who "reported his release via Twitter," he was released again on February 11, 2011. It is significant to observe that during Amer's four year imprisonment,

²⁵ For a criticism of the involvement of Baha'i "human rights" groups, see Michael Barker, "[Female Circumcision and the Tahirih Justice Center](#)," *Swans Commentary*, July 13, 2009. Likewise, for a discussion of the links between neoconservatives, Zionists, and Darfur "activism", see Michael Barker, "[The Project for a New American Humanitarianism: Olympic Ambitions from Darfur to Tibet and Beijing](#)," *Swans Commentary*, August 25, 2008.

At the 2010 Cairo Human Rights Film Festival, which is organized by the American Islamic Congress: "Alhurra Television's original documentary, *Konoungo: The Darfurian Exile* ... received top billing..." Annon, "Alhurra's documentary, *Konoungo: The Darfurian Exile* receives top billing at the third Cairo Human Rights Film Festival," *States News Service*, December 3, 2010.

one of his three defense lawyers was an individual named Ahmed Seif El-Islam Hamad, who some years earlier had cofounded the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre (which he presently heads).²⁶ The offices of this Law Centre are based at No. 1 Souq el-Tawfikiyah St (Cairo), a building which also houses the offices of the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (whose web site was set up by ANHRI), and the April 6 Movement. Furthermore, the activists who coordinated the ongoing insurrection in Egypt were based in this very same building during the uprising itself. For further details, see the fly-on-the-wall documentary "[Seeds of Change](#)," which was produced by *Al Jazeera* and filmed within this building during the January uprising.²⁷

The Egyptian government was well aware of the organizing efforts of this core of activists working with the April 6 Movement, which explains why on January 19, 2001, the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights issued a public statement calling for the immediate release 17 bloggers and political activists who had recently been arrested and detained (on January 15). It is important to note that many of these activists were linked to the US-backed pro-democracy movement: like for example, Al-Ghad Party member and the cofounder of the April 6 Movement, Ms. Israa Abd Al Fatah Rashed, who is the media coordinator at the NED-funded Egyptian Democratic Academy; Al-Ghad Party member Bassem Samir, who is the executive director of the Egyptian Democratic Academy; and Basem Fathy who also works for the Academy as their projects director. The chair of the Academy, Hossam El Din Ali, is a member of Al-Ghad's high council, and leads the Port Said branch of the electoral and civil resistance monitoring group U-Shahid (www.u-shahid.org), a group which again receives support from the NED. (One should observe that the leader of the Al-Ghad Party, Ayman Nour, is a board member of Saad Eddin Ibrahim's NED-funded Ibn Khaldun Center.)

Imperial Solidarity for a New Generation

Recall that in March 2008, Ms. Rashid along with Ahmed Maher (who is the star of the aforementioned *Al Jazeera* puff piece) had established the April 6 Facebook Strike Group (the April 6 Movement) in support of workers in Mahalla al-Kobra, an industrial city north of Cairo. According to Dalia Ziada, and as referred to in the *Al Jazeera* documentary, members of the April 6 Movement then received training from Peter Ackerman's International Center for Nonviolent Conflict and have worked closely with the US "democracy

²⁶ Formed in 1999, this Law Centre was named after the late Hisham Mubarak (who had died in 1998). According to *The New York Times*, Hisham who was the winner of the 1993 Reebok Human Rights Award, "conver[ted] to the cause of human-rights came during his own arrest in August 1989, while taking part in a protest for higher wages for Egypt's iron and steel workers. Tortured and beaten in prison, he was left partially deaf in one ear." The NYT's report continues: "After his release, Mr. Mubarak devoted himself to using the law to defend human rights, training at Amnesty International in London, as well as with the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, and the Ibn Khaldoun Center, two of Egypt's first independent civic groups." Judith Miller, "Hisham Mubarak Dies at 35," *The New York Times*, January 15, 1998.

²⁷ One should note that the Western corporate media has a vested interest in claiming that the uprisings were precipitated by just a handful of moderate activists; and likewise, any truly radical organizers are unlikely to want to have their personal involvement in a potentially revolutionary situation widely publicized by the corporate media -- unless of course they have a death wish.

promoting" community.²⁸ Ironically, none of these "democratic" commitments are hidden from the public -- far from it, they are widely advertised -- and in a [speech](#) Ms. Rashid gave at the sixth assembly of the NED-initiated World Movement for Democracy (which was held in April 2010 in Indonesia), she highlighted the key role that the display of "international solidarity" shown by the "democracy promoting" establishment had fulfilled in helping promote their cause, and thereby ensuring the prompt release of imprisoned activists.

The World Movement for Democracy has a steering committee that consists of "democracy" activists from all over the world, and Egypt's representative on their committee is Hisham Kassem. Widely considered to be one of Egypt's "most prominent publishers and democracy activists" in liberal circles anyway, Kassem is the former vice president of the Al Ghad Party, and has previously served as chairman of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights -- a group that has received almost continuous annual support from the NED between 1994 and 2005. By making the foregoing connections, I am not in any way implying that the work of pro-democracy activists who collude with "democracy promoting" elites is necessarily counterrevolutionary. The point is that while funding does not necessarily determine future action, it does help create a context from which future action is constructed.

More recently, in June 2010, Ms. Rashid received the *New Generation Democratic Activist Award* from the neoconservative "democracy" organization, Freedom House, while attending their conference entitled *Dialogue on Reform in the Arab World*. This meeting was part of Freedom House's "New Generation of Advocates" program, and was the "final in its series of high-level roundtable dialogues" organized "to envisage a new strategy for international engagement with civil society in the Middle East and North Africa." Ten activists from seven countries in the Middle East and North Africa participated in the final New Generation "dialogue" conference, with three activists coming from Egypt: these being Ms. Rashid, Majed Sorour (who is the executive director of the NED-funded One World Foundation for Development and Civil Society Care), and Anwar Esmat El Sadat (who is the founder of the Reform and Development Party in Egypt). The final individual, Anwar Esmat El Sadat, happens to be "an active member in the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs," where he works alongside leading members of the Egyptian Oligarchy (which are discussed in my article "[Egyptian People Power Versus the Oligarchy](#)"). Such meetings, of course, provide a vital means by which the international "democracy promoting" community can seek to understand and influence the ebb and flow of grassroots (and elite) liberal democratic activism.

The person in charge of running this successful and interventionist "New Generation" program was Sherif Mansour, who is Freedom House's program officer for Middle East and North Africa, and is a former program manager for the Ibn Khaldoun Center (which is headed by American Islamic Congress board member, Saad Eddin Ibrahim). Here it is interesting to note that Sherif Mansour is "currently pursuing his Master degree in International Affairs at the Fletcher School of Tufts University," which, as one might recall, is where Dalia

²⁸ Roula Khalaf, "US Non-violence Centre Trained Egypt Activists," *Financial Times*, February 15, 2011.

Ziada is similarly "studying for MA Degree in International Relations."²⁹ Mansour also worked as the coeditor, with Maria Stephan, of the recently published *Civilian Jihad: Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization, and Governance in the Middle East* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); a book that Stephan worked on while based at Peter Ackerman's "democracy promoting" International Center on Nonviolent Conflict.³⁰

Contrary to the fact that many liberals in the United States remain uncritical of Freedom House's "democracy promoting" ventures, it should be emphasized that this is a deeply neoconservative organization. Recent people who have chaired their board of trustees include Bette Bao Lord (1993-2001),³¹ Kissinger McLarty Associates executive Bill Richardson (2001-03), the former head of the CIA (and signatory of the Project for a New American Century), James Woolsey (2003-05), Peter Ackerman (2005-09), and former US Deputy Secretary of Defense for the Reagan administration, William H. Taft IV (2009-present).

The Strategic Public Propaganda Project

As a former trustee of Freedom House, the former US Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs (2001-09), Paula Dobriansky, exemplifies the type of people who enforce the mandates of US "democracy promoters" globally: thus she is the former vice chair of the National Endowment for Democracy, a member of the elite think tank the Trilateral Commission, and supporter of the Project for a New American Century. Obviously, one can understand why just last month Dobriansky played a central role in a new project launched (on January 28) by the Bipartisan Policy Center's (BPC) National Security Initiative, known as the Strategic Public Diplomacy Project, which is...

...designed to re-conceptualize America's public diplomacy and outreach to audiences around the world. Co-chaired by Ambassador James Glassman and Secretary Dan Glickman, the Strategic Public Diplomacy Project seeks to develop recommendations on ways to tightly integrate public diplomacy with foreign policy to advance US strategic interests in a new media age. The BPC believes US policymakers should treat public diplomacy as a vital part of our foreign policy toolbox, on par with traditional diplomacy and

²⁹ In addition, Sherif Mansour is the vice president of the International Quranic Center, a group that is headed by the aforementioned cofounder of the Center for Islamic Pluralism and former NED visiting fellow, Ahmed Subhy Mansour.

³⁰ "While at Fletcher, Stephan wrote a PhD dissertation entitled, 'Nonviolent Insurgency: The Role of Civilian-Based Resistance in the East Timorese, Palestinian and Kosovo Albanian Self-Determination Movements.' Her dissertation advisors were Richard Shultz, Eileen Babbitt and Peter Ackerman."

It is interesting to note that while Mansour was credited with being a coeditor of this book when it was submitted to its publisher under the former title *Civilian Resistance in the Middle East*, he was dropped from this position when the book was actually published as *Civilian Jihad* in 2009. With no irony intended, Stephen Zunes coauthored a chapter in this book with Saad Eddin Ibrahim titled "External Actors and Nonviolent Struggles in the Middle East"; Zunes is the chair of the academic advisory board of the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict. For a detailed criticism of Zunes' dangerous but servicable misrepresentation of the history of nonviolence, see Michael Barker, "[Blinded by People-Power: Stephen Zunes on the Ousting of Dictators](#)," *Swans Commentary*, March 14, 2011.

³¹ Bette Bao Lord's husband Winston Lord is the former chair of the National Endowment for Democracy, and former president of the Council on Foreign Relations (1977-85).

military power.³²

Serving alongside Paula Dobriansky on the project's steering committee is none other than American Islamic Congress executive director, Zainab Al-Suwaij -- which is not surprising given that the project's web site suggests that they "will look at how the US Government should conduct public diplomacy around the globe, specifically toward countries with Muslim majorities..." Other members of the steering committee include Peter Berkowitz and Michael Doran, a duo who are illustrative of the new breed of neoconservatives committed to regime change through "democracy promotion." And the Strategic Public *Propaganda* Project would have certainly been amiss without the helping hand of a Zionist, so Robert Satloff the executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (a think tank closely aligned with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) was duly recruited to help oversee their operations.

Two further individuals with impeccable media connections who sit on the steering committee of the Strategic Public Diplomacy Project include Preston Padden, who is the former president of the ABC Television Network, and Aaron Lobel, who is the president of America Abroad Media -- a propaganda group whose advisory board includes the likes of Peter Ackerman, James Woolsey, and Lester Crown. This just leaves two previously unmentioned steering committee members of this sophisticated propaganda project. The first is Joseph Nye, who is the author of *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (PublicAffairs, 2004), and is himself a key member of the power elite, serving on the board of directors of both the Council on Foreign Relations and the Trilateral Commission. The second is Jared Cohen, a former staffer at the US Department of State, who is now the director of Google's newly created Google Ideas "think/do tank." Cohen is particularly interesting because he is the cofounder of Alliance for Youth Movements, a non-profit whose web site says they are "dedicated to helping grassroots activists to build their capacity and make a greater impact on the world." Thus given the relevance of this group's activities to this article, the following section will introduce some of the people associated with this Youth Movement project.

Neoliberal Youth Movements Inc.

Formed in 2008, the main activity undertaken by Jared Cohen's Alliance for Youth Movements is to organize an annual summit, which invites activists from all over the world, to share ideas with leading "democracy promoting" members of the US national security state. These summits have been running since the group's formation in 2008, and so far their three conferences boast of having invited "88 delegates representing 25 countries" to mingle with the power elite. To illustrate the dubious calibre of the activists who were invited to share ideas with people like Sherif Mansour at the 2008 summit, we might highlight the presence of two particularly anti-democratic individuals, these being the US representative of Sumate (Rosa Rodriguez), which is the

³² Annon, "Bipartisan Policy Center Launches Strategic Public Diplomacy Project Led by Former Ambassador James Glassman and Secretary Dan Glickman," *Targeted News Service*, January 28, 2011.

notorious NED-funded Venezuelan organization that has played a key role in agitating for the removal of President Chávez; and the other being British citizen, Maajid Nawaz, who is the director of a "counter-extremism think tank" known as the Quilliam Foundation, which aims to promote the voices of "moderate Muslims," and just so happens to "exhibit a remarkably benign, and at times fawning, attitude towards Zionism."³³

Since the first summit was held in 2008 only two Egyptian-related activists have attended the Alliance for Youth Movements' annual event: Mideast Youth's founder Esra'a Al Shafei and Soliya's outreach officer Karim El Mantawi (who was born in Egypt) -- both of whom attended the 2010 conference in London.

As Mideast Youth has already been discussed in this article, it is worth briefly introducing Soliya, which is a nongovernmental organization that was founded by the former director of communications for America Abroad Media, Lucas Welch. As they note:

Soliya works to promote mutual respect and understanding between young people from Muslim and Western societies. Since 2003 we have successfully implemented our pioneering program, called the Connect Program, in over 70 universities around the world, reaching over 2600 students. The Connect Program directly connects university students in the Middle East, North Africa, South-Asia, Europe and the United States via groundbreaking online collaboration and communication technology.

Shamil Idriss is the current CEO of Soliya, and prior to taking up this post he had served as the senior adviser for Islamic-Western relations programs at the NED-funded "conflict resolution" organization, Search for Common Ground;³⁴ On top of this, he is a member of the leadership group of the US-Muslim Engagement Project, where he works alongside "democratic" savories like the former executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Thomas Dine). Another Soliya board member who is represented as a leader of the US-Muslim Engagement Project is Dalia Mogahed, who is a trustee of Freedom House, and coauthor, with John Esposito,³⁵ of the book *Who Speaks for Islam?: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (Gallup Press, 2008). Finally, two Soliya board members bringing a specific focus to Egyptian matters are Dina Sherif and Robert Pelletreau. Based at the American University in Cairo, Sherif works closely with Barbara Ibrahim (who is the wife of Saad Eddin Ibrahim) on issues pertaining to philanthropy, and together they coedited the

³³ Maajid Nawaz has formerly spend fours years in the Egyptian prison system (2002-06), and in 2004, Amnesty International adopted him as one of their 'prisoners of conscience.' For a criticism of the Quilliam Foundation, see Muhammad Idrees Ahmad, "[Uncle Tom Galore](#)," *The Fanonite*, April 28, 2008.

³⁴ Liza Chambers, who is the chief program officer of Soliya, is a term member at the Council on Foreign Relations, and prior to setting up Soliya had worked as the program manager for the "democracy promoting" Conflict Management Group: for criticisms of the counter-revolutionary pacifying work undertaken by this group, see Michael Barker, "[Of Conflict and Misdirection](#)," *Swans Commentary*, August 23, 2010.

³⁵ John Esposito is a former board member of the aforementioned Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, serve on the advisory council of a corporate front group called the American Iranian Council, and amongst his many other affiliations is a member of the board of governors of the right-wing Middle East Institute.

book *From Charity to Social Change: Trends in Arab Philanthropy* (American University in Cairo Press, 2008). Pelletreau, on the other hand, is the former US Ambassador to both Egypt and to the Republic of Tunisia; and he complements his work for Soliya by serving as an advisor for Egypt's International Economic Forum, where he works with Frank Wisner (who is the former US Ambassador to both Egypt and the Philippines, and whose father was a high-ranking member of the CIA).

A Preliminary Conclusion

This article has made no effort to document all the Egyptian groups and individuals whose activism is supported by the Western "democracy promoting" community. However, by scrutinizing the Egyptian-focused activities of the US "democracy promoting" community, this article has demonstrated that US foreign policy elites are attempting to constrain the revolutionary (or even democratic) potential of the current insurrection in Egypt. Such US-based meddlers have spent years providing selective aid to activists in Egypt, which, to the detriment of progressive activism, has meant the Western "democracy promoting" community have been able to effect political developments during the present uprising in Egypt. By maintaining such intimate connections to all manner of local activist leaders, US elites certainly recognized that the potential for an insurrection was high, and so, as this article has shown, they ensured that they were well placed in the case that one was actualized. This enabled the better informed parts of the foreign policy making elite to take decisive actions that, they hoped (and continue to hope), will serve to minimize the likelihood of truly radical institutional change occurring on their watch. One can only imagine such elites cynically repeating Trotsky's famous Marxist saying: "We had over our opponents an infinite advantage. We understood them much better than they understand us."

In the short-term, popular anger has been pacified, and the growing people power movement largely defused by ousting Mubarak; but in the long-term, the "democracy promoters" will most certainly aim to install a vaguely pluralistic US-managed "democracy," ideally working in servitude to a powerful military apparatus supplicant to international imperial interests. But whatever happens, every effort will be made to ensure that Egyptians should not be allowed to democratically elect their own chosen representatives without the generous aid of the imperial "democracy promoting" community.

To be sure, US foreign policy elites did not and cannot *control* popular uprisings in Egypt, or anywhere else for that matter, but they most certainly *can* and *are* succeeding in controlling the movements portrayal in the mass media.³⁶ This is an important difference, as the ongoing media offensive will severely limit the insurrection's potential to evolve into a genuine revolution, and such misreporting will certainly inhibit its ability to inspire revolutionary movements for social change in the West. Unfortunately, the propaganda war on the potentially revolutionary Egyptian uprising continues apace, and few

³⁶ For useful discussion of the misrepresentation of US-backed activists, see Stephen Gowans, "[Is Gene Sharp Superman?](#)" *What's Left*, February 16, 2011.

writers (even counting those within the radical media) have submitted the mainstream media's dangerous coverage to the rigorous scrutiny that it deserves. Indeed, the handful of authors who do highlight the vital support that the US government has given to the so-called leaders of the uprising are quickly dismissed as conspiracy theorists. Likewise, little attention is paid to historical precedents that demonstrate that the US is perfectly willing to manage transitions from US-backed dictatorships to equally useful and oppressive US-managed democracies.³⁷

It is sad but true that elite "democracy promoters" have insinuated their way into influential parts of the Egyptian activist community, but despite this major set-back, there is nothing to stop such activists from disowning their imperial handlers, and choosing to ally themselves with any emergent grassroots revolution for genuine social change. Indeed, one can hope that this was their intention all along. But unfortunately such US-backed activists are unlikely to take such action of their own volition, and, as always, the revolutionary task to force such change -- to demand an end to US interference -- must be left to the people of Egypt themselves. Activists further afield on the other hand can show their genuine solidarity for the people of Egypt by withdrawing their uncritical support for activists working hand-in-glove with the imperial "democracy promoters."

³⁷William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Kim Scipes, *KMU: Building Genuine Trade Unionism in the Philippines, 1980-1994* (New Day Publishers, 1996).