



CYBERNOTES

A potential human rights catastrophe is unfolding in Libya as protesters brave live gunfire and death for a third day running. Libya is trying to impose an information blackout, but it can't hide a massacre.

— Sarah Leah Whitson,
Middle East and North Africa
director at Human Rights
Watch, speaking on Feb. 20,
www.afronline.org.

Social Media as a Revolutionary Force

The future of the uprisings that recently overthrew the leaders of Tunisia and Egypt, and threaten to do the same in Libya, is still uncertain as we go to press in mid-March. But one thing is already clear: they have already demonstrated the power of social media to shape revolutions.

On Feb. 22, the Carnegie Endowment's Michele Dunne spoke to the Women's Foreign Policy Group on the topic of "Egypt: How a Virtual Revolution Became Actual." In her analysis, Tunisian President Ben Ali's Jan. 14 overthrow inspired many different elements of Egyptian society to join forces against President Hosni Mubarak. This transformed "virtual" activism, which had been slowly gathering force there since 2008, into mass protests.

To counter this, state-owned Telecom Egypt, which owns most of the fiber-optic cables that transmit information, flipped the "off" switch on Jan. 28. This severely inhibited the opposition's ability to use Facebook, Twitter and other social media to organize gatherings. As James Glanz and John Markoff report in a Feb. 15 *New York Times* article, similar telecommunications monopolies exist across the Middle East and North Africa, making it relatively easy for governments to halt the flow of information, at least temporarily. Even so, the shutdown in Egypt lasted barely a week.

Meanwhile, as Tina Rosenberg explains in a Feb. 16 *Foreign Policy* commentary titled "Revolution U," the Egyptian youth movement had already learned an important lesson from the botched protests of April 6, 2008: No group can succeed without a strategy and a clear message, regardless of the number of fans it has on Facebook.

That said, the sheer popularity of the Facebook pages for the April 6 Youth Movement and We Are All Khaled Said (named for an Alexandria businessman who was dragged from an Internet café by police and beaten to death in the street last summer) helped break the barrier of fear in Egypt. That support, in turn, gave revolutionary groups the confidence to mount increasingly effective protests.

Shashank Joshi of the Royal United Services Institute, a British defense think-tank, notes that social media provided a conduit for young people who stand outside formal institutions. As the region's large youth population searches for ways to participate in society, social media are a useful, highly visible tool. Joshi also credits the role of social networks in accelerating the circulation of imagery and testimony to fuel international support and draw in the uncommitted.

On the Feb. 14 edition of "PBS NewsHour," Al-Jazeera's Abderrahim Foukara explained how the marriage of television with new media makes it possible to spread messages and gather information from citizens on the ground. Appearing on the same program, Washington State University's Lawrence Pintak hailed the Egyptian opposition's communications strategy as a "one-two punch." Social media helped the youth groups coordinate their protests, while television dealt the knockout blow by broadcasting their protests around the country.

During the second week of protests in Egypt, meanwhile, a Feb. 5 *Washington Post* editorial sharply criticized the State Department for not using the \$30 million that Congress allocated for support of global Internet freedom in the Fiscal Year 2010 budget. In fact, over the past three years, the State De-

partment has awarded \$20 million in grants to fund Internet freedom in various countries. In a Feb. 15 speech at George Washington University, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to Internet freedom and announced that State plans to spend more than \$25 million to support it this year.

We will continue to report on this lively debate, both in upcoming editions of *Cybernotes* and elsewhere in the *Journal*.

— Danielle Derbes, Editorial Intern

Controlling an Army of Contractors

On Feb. 24 the Commission on Wartime Contracting (www.wartimecontracting.gov) issued its second report to Congress detailing 32 ways to eliminate billions of dollars in waste associated with the federal government's unprecedented use of contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Titled "At What Risk? Correcting Over-Reliance on Contractors in Contingency Operations," the report estimates that Uncle Sam has spent \$177 billion since 2002 on contractors operating in the two countries. Currently, about 200,000 of them work there, a force roughly equal to the combined number of U.S. civilian and military forces currently assigned to those war zones. Yet even as the use of hired hands has become a "default option" for the Defense Department, State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development, vigorous oversight and management are too often an administrative after-thought.

The commission says that contractors have generally performed well in Afghanistan and Iraq. But bribes, kickbacks and money laundering have tarnished their image. "War by its nature

entails waste," the report says. "But the scale of the problems in Iraq and Afghanistan also reflects the toxic interplay of huge sums of money pumped into relatively small economies."

Commission Co-Chair Michael Thibault, a former deputy director of the Defense Contract Audit Agency, comments: "When it comes to oversight of contingency contracting, we've been driving beyond the reach of our headlights. Reforms are badly needed."

After explaining the budgetary and policy reasons for America's over-reliance on contractors, the study pro-

poses an array of legislative, regulatory and budgetary measures. Key recommendations include:

- Growing the federal government's organic capability to perform critical functions and developing a deployable contingency-acquisition cadre;
- Restricting reliance on contractors for security functions;
- Strengthening enforcement tools that hold contractors and government officials accountable for performance;
- Establishing high-level positions at Defense, State and USAID, and a new "dual-hatted" policy position in the executive branch with responsibility

Sites of the Month: www.girleffect.org and www.girlup.org

To change the world, invest in girls: This is the simple but powerful concept being promoted and spread online in two major campaigns, *The Girl Effect* and *GirlUp*.

- When a girl in the developing world receives seven or more years of education, she marries four years later and has 2.2 fewer children.
- An extra year of primary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 10 to 20 percent. An extra year of secondary school: 15 to 25 percent.
- When a girl gets a chance, she will reinvest her income and knowledge back into the community and can break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

These notes from www.girleffect.org are part of a global campaign to help girls in the developing world help themselves and their communities. The idea is that when a girl reaches adolescence, she is at a crossroads.

The Girl Effect campaign — "the unique potential of 600 adolescent girls to end poverty for themselves and the world" — seeks to raise awareness and support for girls in the developing world. The message is spreading primarily through social media via a short, inspiring video that illustrates the way things go for many girls in the developing world after age 12, depending on the opportunities they have. The Web site offers toolkits for raising awareness, starting clubs and fundraising. These can be used to raise money for the Girl Effect Fund or for any other organization that seeks to assist girls in the developing world.

A related campaign — *GirlUp* — launched by the United Nations Foundation is designed to engage and connect American teens to efforts to improve the lives of girls in the developing world. Specifically, the aim is to mobilize 100,000 American girls to raise money and awareness to fight poverty, sexual violence and child marriage in the developing world. And in the process, they gain leadership and advocacy skills.

The *GirlUp* site, www.girlup.org, is friendly, and pink, and includes material to inspire American teens to get outside their own personal worlds and get involved. *GirlUp* uses Facebook, Twitter and other social media, blogs and teen representatives to get the message out.

— Shawn Dorman, Associate Editor