Causes of the egyptian revolution

History, Revolution

CHAPTER II

1. Literature Review

Revolution is a process of rapid and fundamental change of the social, economic, and political systems, leading to collapsing an old regime and its associated elite. By studying concepts and historical examples of revolutions, we can find some valuable points common for all revolutionist movements, thus helping analyze the motives of the Egyptian Revolution.

Ted Robert Gurr defines revolution as, " highly organized political violence with wide spread general participation, designed to over-throw the regime or dissolve the state and accompanied by extensive violence."[1]The term *revolution* can be used differently in many contexts; however, it usually means a violent overthrow of a regime or social structure or a great sudden change in social principles. A revolution typically characterizes a complete change from one way of doing something to a different way that is usually represents the reverse.

Gurr writes, " men are quick to aspire beyond their social means and quick to anger when those means prove inadequate, but slow to accept their limitations."[2]He also states, " people act out their frustrations if they believe that they stand a chance of relieving some of their discontent through violence."[3]He explains this, however, by signifying that angry people are likely to be more open to arguments that violence would help, so emotion eliminates the calculation, making acts less than rational.

Jeff Goodwin gives two explanations for revolution. He defined revolution in one definition as " any and all instances in which a state or a political regime

is overthrown and thereby transformed by a popular movement in an irregular, extra-constitutional and/or violent fashion". He made also a narrow definition and points out " revolutions entail not only mass mobilization and regime change, but also more or less rapid and fundamental social, economic and/or cultural change, during or soon after the struggle for state power."[4]Both definitions tell us that revolutions are instruments for changing a system.

From another perspective, Jack Goldstone defines revolution as " an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and non-institutionalized actions that undermine authorities".[5]He does not talk about large mobilization movements. He simply mentions revolutions as an effort to change political institutions.

Proponents of Marxist thought use the term *revolution* in a very particular way. While reforms are changes in existing social and cultural system, social revolutions cause a sudden shift from one social order to another. For example, Theda Skocpol described revolution as " rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below,"[6]attaching revolutions to a combination of several conflicts between state, bourgeoisies and the lower class people. She also states, " revolutions are not just extreme forms of individual or collective behavior. They are distinctive conjectures of socio-historical structures and processes,"[7]attributing revolutions to social elements.

What observable political conditions ought to prevail before a revolution begins? Charles Tilly states that three conditions appear to be necessary, and a fourth strongly facilitating. The three apparently necessary conditions are as follows:

1. Alliances or coalitions of contenders, bringing forward claims to the control the state that is currently being controlled by the members of the regime.

2. A significant part of the given population's commitment to those claims

3. Reluctance or ineffectiveness of the government to put an end to these alternative coalitions or people's commitment to their claims.

4. Establishment of alliances or coalitions between members of the regime and the contenders bringing forward alternative claims. [8]

From a different of view, James Defronzo explains conditions that make revolutions possible in terms of five factors: mass frustration, divided elites, unifying motivations that unite different social groups in support of revolution, a severe political crisis for the government including legitimacy loss and loyalty of armed forces, and a permissive or tolerant world environment in which other nations do not intervene to stop a revolution from developing.[9]

He argues that a high amount of mass discontent usually stems from three steps independently or a combination of them: a decline in living situations; a change in the moral tolerability of current conditions involving people feeling that their lives can and should be better; or a period of betterment in the people's living conditions followed by a severe decline.[10]Displeasure

previous to an outburst of a revolutionary movement is often deepened by sensational events that stir up many people such as violent government suppression of challengers.

According to Jack Goldstone, revolutions rarely triumph because the conditions rarely coincide. Monarchic states are able to sustain popular support through making appeals respect for nationalism and royal tradition. Privileged elites, who are often enriched by such governments, will only abandon them if their conditions or the doctrine of the rulers changes radically. It is difficult for a general mobilization to triumph because it requires reconciliation of the different interests of the rural or urban poor, students, the middle class people, and many ethnic or social groups. There are many events in history such as student activists, workers' strikes, and peasant uprisings that were quickly suppressed because they were a movement of one single group, rather than of a large one. Other international states have often gotten involved in these uprisings to support authoritarian rulers in order to preserve balance and make the international system stable.[11]

Even if revolutionary efforts fail, they can possibly result in significant social change. Government or dominant groups will make concessions so as to settle down the protestors, when people try to make an important change in society. Even if these concessions do not satisfy the people's demands of a total change, they can indicate significant progress. At times, social change can take place step by step because unsuccessful revolts gradually lead a society into a different way, until a new lifestyle is finally achieved.

Not all turbulence should be labelled as revolution. Political turmoil is highly possible during the *process* of modernization. In Samuel Huntington's words " it is not a lack of modernity rather the efforts to achieve it that causes political turmoil."[12]Social mobilization and economic development may be disruptive. For example, economic development results in high economic inequality and social mobilization causing that inequality to be less legitimate.[13]A discrepancy between the public wellbeing and private interest becomes apparent when a culture improves, resulting in the rise of corruption as a problem. This problem can lead to the entrance of new groups to the current political system, or it can promote economic growth if government creates it through the expanse of government regulation. Though corruption may weaken the current regime, it can make political parties stronger, and in fact promote political development in countries where the regime has too much authority. [14]

Theda Skocpol states that social revolutions are rapid and basic transformations of a society's state and class structures. What makes Social Revolutions important is that basic changes in social and political structure occur and these changes take place by means of intense sociopolitical conflict.[15]In the end, these changes lead to the collapse of one system and the erection a new one.

The French Revolution was a social and political one that supplanted feudalism with capitalism. People did not just get rid of the monarchy, but also they killed thousands of aristocrats who had taken advantage of people for centuries. Peasants made up most of the people and the feudal

relationship between those peasants and landlords was eradicated. It paved the way for capitalist relationships of manufacture and trade.

In " *Comparative Revolutionary Movements* ," Thomas H. Greene argues that if economic conditions of a state worsen, they can lead to a revolution. [16]The reason for the economic downturn, which led to the overturn of the government in Ghana, was the worsening agricultural production that caused great trade imbalance, a huge overseas loan, and extremely high unemployment rates.[17]Likewise, the economic crisis between 1970s and 1980s in Poland exploded enormous revolts and high rates of discontent. [18]Neil Smelser states that economic issues, such as unemployment, food scarcities, rising food prices, and decreased earnings are related to the upsurge of violence between Mexico and England in a situation similar to what was seen before the French Revolution.[19]

One of the most important factors that gave rise to the Mexican revolution in 1911 was the economic crisis that the country experienced at the end of Porfirio Diaz's rule. High levels of inflation and unemployment rates in the last four years of Diaz`s reign, causing Mexico to experience deterioration and stagnation. Decline in the price of sugar, which was the country's chief export product, was the main reason behind the decline in the Mexican economy. Likewise, in Cuba, the over-dependence on sugar as an economic incentive brought about high levels of unemployment rate and worsening economic conditions when exports to the U. S. diminished. The economic crisis of the late 1950s was only credited to sugar plantation and following unemployment. This over-dependence on single business, together with

widespread corruption and nepotism by the Batista government also brought about increasing unemployment rates, particularly during non-growing seasons. The living standard in Cuba decreased dramatically because Cuban wages were unable to contend with high inflation levels during the 1950s. [20]

2. History of revolutions in Egypt

Making revolution is not something new for Egyptians because they have had three momentous revolutions in their history. One of them was he 1881 Urabi Revolution which dethroned a crooked and comprador monarchs. Another one was the Revolution of 1919, which almost overthrew British military hegemony, and the other one was 1952 revolution, which initiated the military despotism of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak for sixty years. Creating the second parliamentary regime on the African Continent, the first revolution turned out to be successful before foreign military intervention changed the form of government. After the defeat, the British formed a colonial rule in Egypt for more than seventy years. The second revolution was a persistent, widespread revolt controlled by a range of pro-democracy protestors from many different civil societies. Although violently suppressed, it did compel the British to make some concessions. The third revolution in Egypt is different from the first two because it was a revolution that went out of its way to restrict popular involvement.[21]Anyhow, in 1881 it finally ended the regime of the royal family and started a course of British removal from Egypt.

3. Views on the Causes of the Egyptian Revolution

What are the causes that gave rise to this important synergy and resistance? Three main reasons have emerged to explain this mystery: technology, Tunisia, and discomfort. [22] It is obvious that Tunisian unrest was a catalyst, motivating Egyptians to rush out into the streets. The Tunisian government was even more oppressive than the government of Egypt. So if the Tunisians were able to get rid of their ruthless dictator, why could the Egyptians not manage? Tunisian upheaval might have been the starting point, but there are many other important changes in Egypt's political and social background that also give rise to an explanation for the revolution. Egyptians had increasingly resorted to protests and street politics to claim their demands and disrupt the position of their monarchs. Since 2004, Egypt had seen an increasing number of protests and rallies led by textile and health workers, judges, doctors, pharmacists, lawyers, transportation workers and even property tax collectors. These workers wanted better salaries and working conditions, and relief from the harsh poverty that has distressed most of the people, whereas the rich became obviously richer and public organizations that in the past delivered service for poor Egyptians descended toward disrepair and jobs decreased as well.[23]People fell into a miserable situation where there were no hopes, nor dreams left for a better future for their children.

There are many other assessments regarding the origins of the Egyptian 2011 Revolution. Political thinker and strategist Dr. Tarek Heggy, one of Egypt's more famous authors on the subject of political reform in Egypt, states that the Egyptian people's desire for democracy, the ruling system and legal elections were the main motives for the revolution. Another

specialist Mohammed Fadel states that bribery and corruption in the government were the most important reasons behind the revolution.[24]

Mona El-Ghobashy expresses in her article that the 2011 revolution occurred because there had been an unexpected change in the equal distribution of resources between ruled and rulers. [25] She also provides three reasons for the revolution: " technology, Tunisia and tribulations." [26] Moreover, Ursula Lindsey has argued that social media, whereas it did not directly bring about the upheaval, shared a spectacular role in connecting the people who would join latter in the protests. [27] The Bank Information Center (BIC) [28] in 2007 reported that the World Bank had shown the following problems as among the most tenacious challenges that Egypt faced in fighting poverty and maintaining sustainable development: high unemployment, increasing poverty, social and economic inequality, high budget deficit, and net public debt. Every problem, whether it was corruption, the country's foreign policy, economic conditions or social problems, played a role in motivating Egypt's people to revolt.

The people, particularly young people, had important access to use of information and communication networks, such as mobile phone services, new social media and TV were important as events blossomed. While the government used the state information, disseminating systems to spread propaganda against the rebellions, the protesters dispersed their message by using means that was creative, disciplined, and revolutionizing. The victory of the revolution, at least for its main demand, resignation of

Mubarak, was associated with defamation of state-controlled newscast, a blossoming of *home-produced* media of all kinds.[29]

While social media did not create the Egyptian uprising, they played an immense role in getting together many of the young people who would ultimately join the demonstrations. *We Are All Khalid Sa' id* was one of the Facebook groups that was created in 2010 to honor a young man beaten by police and died, having more than half-million members in the protests on January 25, 2011. These groups were instrumental in organizing the protests and a new expression has come into the Egyptian language. The internet-led generation that organized the initial protests is known as the *Facebook Kids* . [30]

In general, street politics and in particular, the Arab street politics were more complicated. The Arab street is chiefly an appearance of public sentiment, but it has experienced important changes in its style and way of expression. Street politics is the contemporary theater of discontent people. It has played a great role in such massive political events as the French Revolution, anti-colonial fights, nineteenth-century industrial movements, the velvet revolutions in Eastern Europe, and various anti-war protests. For ordinary people, the street is the main site of politics, or and it is the chief place to spend time for those who do not generally have positions of power. It is at the same time social and cultural, continuous and present, a home of the strange and the familiar, the visible and the verbal, the street symbolizes a complex place where opinions and attitudes are formed, spread and voiced in a unique way.[31]

Economic inequalities and poverty among different groups of society are important precursors for many revolutions. Welch and Taintor mention those concepts in addition to rapid economic worsening, poverty and inequalities between manufacturing and the distribution of that merchandise.[32]Cynthia McClintock argues that the inconsistency between global and domestic markets causes the latter to depend on the former concerning reliance on industrialized states for technology and money.[33]Schultz and Slater state that this dependence essentially triggers the separation of society and diminishing of rural population.[34]

The chronic structural problems affecting the Arab world came to a head prior to 2011 through a combination of persistently high unemployment, especially among youth (and educated youth at that), rampant corruption, internal regional and social inequalities, and a further deterioration of economic conditions because of the global 2008 financial crisis and food price increases. Even the initial event in Tunisia that exploded into the Arab Spring upheaval was related to economics. The Tunisian street seller, -Mohamed Bouazizi, burnt himself because of his conditions of poverty.

---

[1]Ted RobertGurr, *Why men rebel* , Princeton, N. J.: Published for the Center of International Studies, Princeton University [by] Princeton University Press, 1970, 11.

[2]Ibid., 58.

[3]Ibid., 210.

[4]Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9.

[5]Jack A. Goldstone, " Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, no. 1 (06, 2001), 142.

[6]Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 4.

[7]Theda Skocpol, " France, Russia, China: A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 18, no. 2 (Apr., 1976), 177.

[8] Charles Tilly, " Does Modernization Breed Revolution?" *Comparative Politics* 5, no. 3, Special Issue on Revolution and Social Change (Apr., 1973), 425-447.

[9]James DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2007), 12.

[10]James DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements* , 13-14.

[11]Jack A. Goldstone, " Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (May/Jun 2011, 2011), 8-16.

[12]Samuel P. Huntington, *Political order in changing societies* , New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968 41.

[13]Samuel P. Huntington, *Political order in changing societies* , 59.

[14] Ibid., 69-70.

[15]Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* , 3.

[16]Thomas H. Greene, Comparative Revolutionary Movements (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Publishing, 1990), 19.

[17]Greene, Comparative Revolutionary Movements, 96.

[18]Ibid., 97.

[19]Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg, the Handbook of Economic Sociology, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 73.

[20]Brian H. Pollitt, *Sugar, " Dependency," and the Cuban Revolution* (Glasgow, Scotland: University of Glasgow, 1985), 196-197.

[21]Jeannie Lynn Sowers and Christopher J. Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt* (London; New York: Verso, 2012), 48.

[22] Ibid., 21.

[23]" The Architects of the Egyptian Revolution," *The Nation* , Saba MahmoodFebruary 14, 2011

[24]Mohamed Fadel, " Public Corruption and the Egyptian Revolution of January 25: Can Emerging International Anti-Corruption Norms Assist Egypt

Recover Misappropriated Public Funds?" Harvard International Law journal, volume 52, April 2011, 293.

[25] El-Ghobashy Mona, *The Journey to Tahrir, The praxis of the Egyptian revolution* , 22 edited by Jeannie Sowers and ChrisToensing, 22.

[26] El-Ghobashy Mona, *The Journey to Tahrir,* 21.

[27] El-Ghobashy Mona, *The Journey to Tahrir,* 54.

[28] Bank Information Center (BIC). http://www. bicusa. org, accessed on (October 19, 2013).

[29]Jeannie Lynn Sowers, Christopher J. Toensing *, The Journey to Tahrir* , 53.

[30]El-Ghobashy Mona, *The Journey to Tahrir,* 54.

[31]Jeannie Lynn Sowers, Christopher J. Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir* , 75.

[32]Claude E. Welch and Mavis B. Taintor, Revolution and Political Change, (California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1972), 149.

[33]Cynthia McClintock, Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: El Salvador's FMLN and Peru's Shining Path, (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998).

[34]Schultz and Slater, " Revolution and Political Change in the Third World," 34.