Dear all,

This week (Tomorrow, Thursday 10/13/11), MESGA is sponsoring a visit and lecture by UT professor Jason Brownlee, entitled Resisting Democracy: America and the Egyptian Regime. His talk is to take place at 4:00 pm in KIMP 105. More details can be found below.

“Resisting Democracy: America and the Egyptian Regime” - A Lecture by Jason Brownlee
Before a daring revolt and watchful army forced President Hosni Mubarak from office, Egypt epitomized how domestic repression and international support sustain authoritarianism. Mubarak’s ouster suggests these variables had deteriorated before the January 25th Revolution began. But, contrary to early, top-down accounts of state breakdown, Egyptian activists, in the face of a coherent and aggressive state, drove military and foreign elites to turn upon Mubarak. In addition, although demonstrators compelled Mubarak's removal, a robust and internationally supported coercive apparatus, the mainstay of Egyptian authoritarianism survived.

Jason Brownlee, Associate Professor of Government at the University of Texas is the author of Authoritarianism in the Age of Democracy (Cambridge UP 2007) and is a frequent national media commentator on Middle East affairs. His talk is sponsored by the Middle East Studies Graduate Association and is free/open to the public. For further information, call 479-575-2175.

Church Protests in Cairo Turn Deadly
In the worst violence since February, at least 24 people were killed Sunday when a protest by Christian Egyptians escalated into rioting against military rule. MORE

NYTimes.com nytdirect@nytimes.com

Robert Fisk, “Anger Rising in Tahrir Square”
The Independent UK July 12, 2011
Robert Fisk writes: "Something has gone badly wrong with the Egyptian revolution. The ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces - just what the 'Supreme' bit means is anyone's guess - is toadying up to middle-aged Muslim Brothers and Salafists, the generals chatting to the pseudo-Islamists while the young, the liberal, poor and wealthy who brought down Hosni Mubarak are being ignored. The economy is collapsing. Anarchy creeps through the streets of Egyptian cities each night. Sectarianism flourishes in the darkness. The cops are going back to their dirty ways."
READ MORE http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/289-134/6586-anger-rising-in-tahrir-square

Stephen Eric Bronner, “Imperiled Revolutions”
Reader Supported News June 24, 2011
Excerpt: "The Arab Spring was marked by spontaneous revolts, lack of charismatic leaders, youthful exuberance, and disdain for more traditional forms of organizational discipline. That is what made these revolts so appealing. Institutional obstacles to democracy, however, require institutional responses: speaking truth to power is no longer enough. Success now hinges on the organization of power by the former insurgents and their ability to deal with the armed forces, the bureaucracy, religious institutions and the global economy."

READ MORE http://www.readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/6374-imperiled-revolutions

US and World Intelligence Agencies

“Newsweek's Nostalgia for Arab Dictatorships”

06/13/2011 by Peter Hart  (from FAIR’s Blog)
If you feel like there hasn't been enough attention paid to the fact that the democratic movements in the Arab world are undermining the power of U.S. elites to have troublemakers tortured and/or killed, rest assured that Newsweek's Christopher Dickey has you covered this week (6/12/11):

Among American spies there’s more than a little nostalgia for the bad old days. You know, back before dictators started toppling in the Middle East; back when suspected bad guys could be snatched off a street somewhere and delivered to the not-so-tender mercies of interrogators in their home countries; back when thuggish tyrants, however ugly, were at least predictable.

It’s not a philosophical thing, just a practical one. Confronted by the cold realities of this year's Arab Spring, many intelligence and counterterrorism professionals now see major dangers looming near at hand, while the good news--a freer, fairer, more equitable and stable Arab world--remains somewhere over the horizon. "All this celebration of democracy is just bullshit," says one senior intelligence officer who's spent decades fighting terrorism and finds his job getting harder, not easier, because of recent developments. "You take the lid off and you don’t know what's going to happen. I think disaster is lurking."

Dickey uses Egypt as one example, explaining that at one point dictator Hosni Mubarak was making plans to hand over power to feared intelligence chief Omar Suleiman. The U.S. supported that idea, but Egyptians weren't especially keen on handing over power to Mubarak's torture chief. Losing this vital link is apparently bad news for U.S. policymakers--though Dickey undercuts the point when he recalls this history:

The "rendition" program continued in close cooperation with Suleiman after 9/11, but the Bush administration evidently pushed hard for the kind of intelligence it wanted rather than the kind it needed. One captured Qaeda operative, Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, was tortured by the Egyptians until he confessed there were operational links between his organization and Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, although in fact there were no such links. "They were killing me," al-Libi was quoted as telling the FBI later. "I had to tell them something."

The premise of the article is that maintaining close ties to Mubarak and his ilk is vital to U.S. interests, and that the current upheaval is bad news. This example would seem to offer rather compelling evidence to the contrary.

Tags: Christopher Dickey, torture

Mubarak Resigning, Call for Democracy
Breaking: Mubarak to step down 2-10-11
|Drew Hudson, USAction/TrueMajority.org to jbennet
Just wanted to make sure you saw the news that we're now expecting Egyptian President Mubarak to step down, maybe as soon as tonight.* It's big news, and makes our call for the U.S. government to invest in Egypt's people, not just its weapons, even more urgent. We don't know what the new government will look like, but what Egypt needs now, after 30 years of dictatorship, is more schools and courts. Let's help them get it.
Tell Congress to invest in people, not guns, for Egypt
Dear Dick,
We should invest in Egypt’s people, not weapons.

Tell Congress to invest in civilian, not military, aid for Egypt and our allies.
The whole world has been inspired by the pro-democracy revolution underway in Egypt. But here in America, we're also worried about further government escalation and crack downs against the non-violent opposition.1

We should be. We’ve already seen a scary preview of what that would look like, when Egypt’s brutal police forces used ‘Made in America’ tear gas on protesters.2

You see, the U.S. gives Egypt over $1.3 billion every year to buy tanks and guns. We even REQUIRE them to buy those weapons from American gun merchants, in a huge backdoor subsidy of the U.S. weapons industry.3

Instead of helping Egypt build schools or roads or even a working court system -- things that could really help them in a moment of crisis like this one -- all we’ve put in their hands is the means to kill people.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. Congress is about to set a new budget for 2012, and how much and what kind of aid we give to Egypt and other countries is very much under discussion.4 Click here to tell Congress that we want to invest in CIVILIAN aid, not military aid and make freedom and democracy our leading exports again.

http://act.truemajorityaction.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=182&code=d2

It’s not just Egypt – all over the world our government gives repressive dictators billions of dollars specifically to buy weapons from American manufacturers.5 The reality is that a lot of those governments use the weapons bought with our tax money to oppress their own people.
The weapons builders don’t care who shoots who with their guns, so long as they can make a fortune selling them. And most taxpayers don’t even know that we spend most of our foreign aid money on weapons. But USAction/TrueMajority members like you have been fighting to cut weapons spending for years. And if the Egypt crisis shows us one thing, it’s that cutting the Pentagon budget is a good idea internationally, as well as domestically.

Help us send that message to Congress, and then, tell some friends too. Everyone wishes we could do something to help the Egyptian protesters – disarming their government is a good place to start.

For Peace,

Drew Hudson
USAction / TrueMajority

* - [http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jITgzAVad8TqVOKRq005ny1JQqig?docId=38f06688b6ec24c569e2db1d62684ccd1](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jITgzAVad8TqVOKRq005ny1JQqig?docId=38f06688b6ec24c569e2db1d62684ccd1)

"Orderly Transition," or "Nothing Burger" Reforms? Benchmarks for US Policy in Egypt 2-10-11

The Obama Administration claims to support an "orderly transition to democracy" in Egypt, but the trajectory of current U.S. policy, without clear benchmarks for reform, is a transition from Mubarak to Mubarakism without Mubarak. "Reforms" and "concessions" announced so far are a "nothing burger" as far as a transition to democracy is concerned. Benchmarks for US policy should include: ending the detention and harassment of journalists and human rights activists, lifting the state of emergency, allowing electoral competition, and restoring judicial supervision of elections. Congress and the Administration should link these benchmarks to US aid.


Egypt: Pyramid Power or Grass-roots Community?

Rabbi Arthur Waskow to jbennet 2-10-11

[office@shalomctr.org](mailto:office@shalomctr.org)

A Prophetic Voice in Jewish, Multireligious, and American Life

“Egypt: -- Despairing under Pyramid Power, Thirsting for Grass-roots Community”
Dear shalom-pursuer, For the last two years, Phyllis [Bennis] and I have been working on a book -- *Freedom Journeys: The Tale of Exodus and Wilderness Across Millennia*. It will be published three weeks from now, by Jewish Lights.

The crucial words in the title are "Across Millennia." Our book is not simply a history of the past, but an incitement toward the future:

What can we learn from the biblical story about the Pharaohs, the Plagues, the Red Sea and Sinai and struggles in the Wilderness -- about our own generation? About arrogant and unaccountable power, nonviolent resistance, the importance and the difficulty of birthing a new kind of community? We see this as a global issue, across all boundaries of nation, religion, even across the boundary between Humanity and all Earth's other life-forms.

So it is with a sense of ironic recognition that I watch the story play out today in -- of all places! -- Egypt.

And my mind goes back not only to the Exodus but also to an earlier biblical story: the story of "Hagar the Egyptian," the second wife of Abraham, mother of his first son Ishmael, forebears of the Arab peoples and of Islam.

In that story, Hagar and Ishmael were thirsting to death amidst a rocky desert. She wept and wept. Her tears opened her eyes, her tears watered a wellspring of new life. She named the waters "The Well of the Living One Who Sees Me."

The wellspring of new life and love in Egypt today is rising from a rock-strewn desert of despair, from the tears of pressed-down people who are standing up and opening eyes long shut, long dry, imprisoned in that iron cage, "stability." They are standing up to be seen by the Living One Who Sees Us All.

Their tears of life and hope spring from the life-dance -- we might call it the Dance of God -- that is a two-step between the urge to control more efficiently what is around us and our urge to commune more lovingly with what is around us.

The urge to Control each other and the Earth around us is a necessary element of life. But when that urge runs amok, there arises a deep swell of desire to strengthen the other step in the Dance, the one that evokes love and community.

Like the ancient Pharaoh, the Egyptian rulers of today had become arrogantly addicted to their own power over their people. Today, two virulent forms of subjugation to Control-Run-Amok roused the Egyptian people to rebel, and to begin creating in their own streets and neighborhoods the forms of a new, reborn Egyptian community. (The community-creation part of the rebels' task was what the ancient Israelite runaway slaves achieved at Sinai and through years of experiment in the Wilderness.)

One aspect of their subjugation was years of humiliation and repression of people from every political party, class, and background by the government and its brutal police. Huge amounts of US military aid to the Egyptian government kept the Army well-fed and quiescent -- quiescent toward both Mubarak and the Uprising -- but the new Pharaoh had a cadre of brutal "overseers" he could deploy.

The other aspect of their subjugation was a spike in the cost of bread -- and that spike was created by the unprecedented droughts and fires in Russia this past summer, which drastically cut the amount of wheat exports that could feed Egyptians.

What caused the Russian drought? The outpouring of CO2 from coal furnaces and autos that is scorching our planet.
These droughts and the famine they induced were the "plagues" imposed on our planet by the pharaohs of Big Oil and Big Coal. It is true that ordinary folk in industrial countries – America most of all – have been addicted to burning fossil fuels. But like all addictions, this one has its Drug Lords, just as nicotine addiction was fueled by Big Tobacco.

Meanwhile, the present US government is dithering once again, as it did about Israeli settlements across the Green Line, as it did about taxing the super-rich, as it did about the "public option" in health care, as it did about oil drilling off our coasts. After brave words of change, it has chosen to bet on the puppet "vice-president" of Egypt appointed by Mubarak. As always, its dithering ends up by siding with the Old Big Power in each situation.

Who is this "vice-president" Omar Suleiman? In his office as head of Egyptian "intelligence," he oversaw the torture of hundreds of his fellow-citizens. And he was the point person for US deliveries of prisoners to be tortured by his thugs, when the US government was too weak of stomach to do the torturing itself. (Not so surprising that the US government wants to put Suleiman in charge of the "transition." )

Is this letter to you angry, full of fury? Yes. I was taught to be angry at pharaohs and tyrants and brutal overseers each year when my family read the Pasover Seder, when we ate the bitter herb to remind us, choking on each breath, how bitter were humiliation, hunger, torture, death.

But I feel more than anger.

I am stirred, as were millions of Egyptians, by the story of the Google exec, of all people (a kind of Egyptian princeling like the one we read about in Torah?) who came out of prison to speak the truth. He spoke truth to power -- and perhaps more important, he spoke truth to the powerless. Who beame empowered by his bravery.

I am stirred by the news stories about Muslims and Christians protecting each other at prayer in Tahrir Square.

I am stirred by hearing that when the government ordered its police to "disappear" and to let thousands of violent criminals out of prison so that resulting chaos would frighten the people into wanting Pharaoh back again, neighbors organized to keep each other and their homes safe.

I am stirred that today Egyptian workers are not walking "out" on strike but walking IN – taking over their workplaces as the auto workers of Detroit and Flint did in the 1930s.

I am stirred by the gentleness, the choice to avoid violence, of the rebels who last Friday kneeled and prostrated themselves in utter vulnerability alongside police and soldiers, to chant the communal prayers.

I am stirred, in short, by love. And by community.

I know full well that in revolutions there are no guarantees that all will end as decently as it began. I also know that what the United States and its allies (Europe, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia) do can make a difference – that the more they try to squash the revolution, the more the revolutionaries will feel the need to toughen up. And the more they will define as their enemy those who try to stuff the Torturer-
General down their throats.

What should we do? Swallow hard and try to imagine a new Egypt, a new Middle East, a new Araby, a new Islam. How could we best be friends with such a new world?

By joining in community with them, as Pharaoh's own daughter joined with Israelite slaves to prevent more murder. By turning military aid into grass-roots economic aid with micro-loans. By insisting that Israel actually take up the Arab League's offer of a full regional peace. By sending the President to Cairo again -- a NEW Cairo -- to celebrate with actual deeds the honeyed words of freedom and of friendship that he spoke last time. By having him visit in Jerusalem not only the Western Wall but also the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and Al Aqsa. By making sure that CO2 from American coal-burning power plants no longer causes droughts in Russia, famines in Africa.

In short, by acting as if the Earth is ONE because the Breath of Life, YyyyHhhhWwwwHhhh, is ONE. Love the Breath of Life, and love your neighbor as yourself. You can't love either ONE without the other, because each ONE is the other.

And that is the fullest meaning of the blessings that we send each other: of shalom, salaam, shantih, namaste, peace: -- Arthur

END OF EGYPT NEWSLETTER #1