**Egypt's Internet Crackdown**

The crackdown on bloggers in Egypt is as ferocious as anything in Iran, and yet the United States has ignored it. David Keyes on the West's shameful silence.

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On January 15, more than two dozen Egyptian bloggers and activists were arrested en route to a show of solidarity following the deaths of six Coptic Christians in the southern province of Qena. Among those detained were some of Egypt's most famous Internet activists, such as Wael Abbas and Ahmad Badawy. The bloggers' cellphones and IDs were taken by Egyptian police. Though they were released a day later, this crackdown sent shockwaves through the dissident community in Egypt. Wael Abbas was even rearrested and sentenced to six months in prison on the spurious charge of damaging an Internet cable.

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The Egyptian government's ruthless repression of Internet activists shows no signs of easing. On the contrary, one of Egypt's leading young bloggers attested on condition of anonymity that the regime's crackdowns have only gotten more sophisticated with every passing month. Though technology has dramatically increased dissidents' capacity to organize and protest, Princeton historian Bernard Lewis told me that it also gives modern Middle Eastern dictators the ability to "surveil, control, and repress undreamt of by Haroun al Rashid, Suliman the Magnificent, al-Hajjaj" and other autocrats of yore.

In the case of Egypt, the familiar dictum that all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing is far from sufficient.Evil triumphs in Cairo because supposedly good men in the West openly and unapologetically fund and arm it. America has supplied Egypt with approximately $50 billion of aid (primarily military) since Hosni Mubarak came to power three decades ago. Stability was supposedly bought at the price of liberty-a fool's bargain. Instead, Egypt remains impoverished, illiterate, autocratic, corrupt, and repressive, not exactly the conditions for lasting stability or peace.

In the summer of 2006, I sat with an Egyptian friend in a Cairo cafe and began to talk politics. He silenced me immediately. "Il hitan liha withan" he said in Arabic. "The walls have ears." I vividly recall the vast numbers of security forces on the streets of Cairo brandishing guns outfitted with bayonets. How revealing, I thought. The Egyptian regime is afraid, first and foremost, of their own people. This is why they do not trust them to write, think, or blog freely. It is also why they need antiquated knives on their ends of their guns. Bayonets will not intimidate any foreign army, but they just might work against bloggers and students.

Last December, 24-year-old blogger Kareem Amer's final appeal was rejected and he now enters his fourth year in prison for the unthinkable crimes of criticizing Egypt's dictator and "insulting" the predominant religion. A steady parade of Western diplomats have come through Cairo in the past four years and it is fair to ask how many times Kareem's name has come up. If ever there was a man whose struggle symbolized the values of America-it is him. He is a staunch advocate of Jeffersonian separation of religion and state and is a living exemplar of Patrick Henry's dictum: Give me liberty or give me death. In his last blog post before his arrest, Amer, who hopes one day to open a human-rights law firm, wrote "I shall not recant, not even by an inch, from any word I have written."

I asked one of Egypt's leading female bloggers, who requested that I not publish her name, if the recent crackdowns increased fear in the blogging community. "No!" she responded defiantly. "The opposite always happens. When someone deprives you of something, you want it more. Kareem Amer is serving four years in jail because of blogging, but this actually increased the number of bloggers not decreased it! The more activists jailed, the more new activists appear."

The primary explanation for the West's appeasement of Egyptian autocracy is faulty priorities. Liberty is playing second fiddle to stability and thus neither has been achieved. Rather, the seeds of misery, terror, extremism, and poverty are being sown in Egypt with open acquiescence from the West.

The release of heroic dissidents like Kareem Amer will be the one true sign that progress is in motion. American aid should be directly conditioned on Egypt's respect for freedom of expression. Anything less constitutes appeasement of tyranny and will come back to haunt us.

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