

EGYPT AND THE DAYS OF ANGER

Introduction

Focus

This *News in Review* story focuses on the revolution that occurred in Egypt in January and February 2011. The revolution led to the fall of an entrenched dictatorship and helped to perpetuate change across the Middle East and beyond.

A wind of revolutionary change began to stir in the small North African country of Tunisia in December 2010. After enduring years of corruption and repression at the hands of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, huge crowds took to the streets demanding he step down. On January 14, 2011, much to their surprise and delight, the protestors were successful, driving Ben Ali and his family from the country and ushering in a new era of democracy.

Inspired by the Tunisian example, masses of Egyptians began to congregate in Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo on January 26, 2011. Protesters voiced similar demands for democracy and the resignation of the country's president, Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled Egypt with an iron fist since 1981. As the size of the protests grew from a few thousand people to almost one million, observers in Egypt and around the world began to wonder if the previously unthinkable might indeed be possible. Could the Mubarak regime—for three decades a solid pillar of authoritarian stability and a dependable supporter of U.S. and Israeli interests in the Middle East—be toppled?

The demonstrators quickly riveted the attention of the world's mass media on the brave and peaceful struggle for democratic change in Egypt and attracted widespread support abroad. The protestors represented a cross-section of Egyptian society: young and old, men and women, Muslims and Christians, middle-class professionals and urban and rural workers. They employed the new communication technologies of social media to spread information and rally new supporters to their cause. Mubarak's government had dealt with protests before, never hesitating to deploy its widely feared internal security apparatus to crush them. But this time, the sheer size and scope of the demonstrations, and their resolutely peaceful tactics, seemed to disable the regime.

For 18 days Egypt, and the world, watched as the drama unfolded in Tahrir Square. After a failed attempt by pro-Mubarak gangs to drive the protestors away by force, and after being advised by the army that it would not fire on its own people, Mubarak's position was no longer tenable. On February 11, 2011, he reluctantly bowed to the inevitable and announced his resignation.

As the crowds in Tahrir Square and other parts of Egypt erupted into ecstatic celebrations, the rulers of other dictatorships across the Middle East and the wider Arab world began to tremble, wondering if they might be the next to share Mubarak's fate. By mid-February, largely peaceful demonstrations for democratic reform were spreading throughout the region, from Morocco in the west to Bahrain and Yemen in the east, and were even beginning to break out in the non-Arab nation of Iran. The revolutionary wind that had started stirring in Tunisia in late 2010 was becoming a full-blown hurricane by the early part of 2011, and no one could predict what the region might look like in the future.

To Consider

1. Why was it such a surprise that the Egyptian regime of President Hosni Mubarak was toppled in less than three weeks?

2. Why did Mubarak have to resign, after successfully crushing protests against his regime many times in the past?

3. What example did the protestors in Egypt set for people in other Middle Eastern and Arab countries?

4. Why is a popular movement for democratic reform sweeping the Middle East and Arab countries?

EGYPT AND THE DAYS OF ANGER

Viewing Questions

As you watch the video, respond to the questions in the spaces provided.

1. Who was Mohammed Bouazizi and why did his actions set off a wave of popular uprisings in his own country and elsewhere in the Arab world?

2. What was the result of the protests in Tunisia?

3. How did the successful uprising in Tunisia influence events in Egypt?

4. Who was the leader of Egypt, and for how long had his regime held power?

5. What were the main reasons why protestors in Egypt were angry at their government?

6. How did Mubarak try to handle the protests against his government? How successful was he in doing so?

7. What new information technologies did the anti-Mubarak protestors use during the uprising?

8. Why did protests in Egypt turn violent?

9. What role did the Egyptian army play during the uprising? How did this affect the result?

10. What promises of political reform did the new military regime make to the Egyptian people?

11. How have the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt inspired protestors in other countries?
