

RELEASE IN PART  
B6

**From:** Anne-Marie Slaughter [redacted]  
**Sent:** Sunday, February 13, 2011 11:41 AM  
**To:** H  
**Cc:** Abedin, Huma; Sullivan, Jacob J  
**Subject:** egypt and china -- something worth reading

B6

This is from The Atlantic on line, from one of their reporters in Shanghai. Worth the read, particularly re Chinese efforts to censor Egypt news. Again, as protests spread to sub-Saharan Africa, the Chinese are going to have real trouble.

Howard French  
The View of Cairo from Authoritarian International ([Atlantic.com](http://Atlantic.com))  
FEB 11 2011, 7:04 PM ET

For unsurprising reasons, the people's uprising in Egypt has been widely cast as an epochal event for Arab political culture, and somewhat more widely, for the entire Middle East.

To limit our understanding of these events in this way, however, is to lose sight of a story playing out against an immensely larger backdrop. The putative and much discussed decline of the United States in recent years has been cast against the perceived successes, or at least the argued attractiveness, of an authoritarian other.

In books like *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*, by Martin Jacques; *The Beijing Consensus: How China's Authoritarian Model Will Dominate the Twenty-First Century*, by Stephen Halper; *The End of the Free Market: Who Wins the War between States and Corporations*, by Ian Bremmer; and in many other recent writings, we have been warned of an almost unfair unfolding contest between the world's messy and often paralyzed democracies, and a rising cohort of efficient, businesslike authoritarian states. They portray those states steadily accounting for more and more of the global GDP, and at the same time convincingly delivering the goods to their peoples: gleaming new airports, high-speed rail systems, seamless new highways, and dependable and often free wireless internet, to name just a few of the typical benefits. Citizens, in turn, happily go about the business of pursuing prosperity and leave the business of government to the mandarin classes to whom such rights and privileges properly belong. Such is, or so we are given to understand, the nature of a winning social contract.

At the apex of this phenomenon, its leading edge in power of example and in power outright, supposedly sits China. Its economic miracle story has recently loomed so large in our imaginations that it has convinced many Americans that its rise at our expense, indeed its eventual overtaking of the United States, is a foregone conclusion.

There are few places, however, for which the disgraced exit of Egypt's Hosni Mubarak carries greater relevance, or where the nature of that country's popular uprising warrants shaking up a conventional wisdom that was shallow stale to begin with and has become badly outdated.

Immediate evidence of this has been provided by the response of China's censors, who have worked furiously to contain news of the events in Egypt within their country, and as that has become less and less practical, to spin the news to fit an unthreatening or even self-reinforcing narrative. For days, Chinese readers have been preposterously treated to stories about evacuation flights put on by their government to bring Chinese nationals back from Egypt, along with residents of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.

Nowhere have these stories attempted an honest explanation of why an evacuation was needed in the first place. To do so would require getting into some deeply messy topics in post-Tiananmen China about popular demands for democracy and accountability and about the military's ambivalent relationship to the political leadership. For the most part, the Chinese media has ended the discussion about Egypt with bromides about how unrest equals

instability and about how instability hurts growth, and by familiar inference how growth is the only thing that matters.

It is hard, though, to overstate the difficulties of spinning the Egypt situation from the perspective of the star of the Authoritarian International, in the delightful phrase of Chrystia Freeland, of Reuters. Things were so much simpler when so-called Color Revolutions swept a number of constituent parts of the former Soviet Union and the Balkans in the early 2000s. Beijing could indulge in the paranoid or cynical fantasy that this was a case of the West using its insidious non-governmental organizations and funding for civil society to undermine authoritarian regimes that had traditionally been in the socialist orbit. This was cast as a hostile takeover, and Beijing used this as an excuse to tighten controls on association both real and virtual. It also spread its word of caution in the non-democratic world: "Beware. If you let your guard down, this is what the West will do to you."

But Hosni Mubarak looked in vain for a Western plot to take over Egypt, and so will Chinese propagandists. The revolution in Tahrir Circle was homegrown, and moreover from the people's perspective, at least, it was peaceful. This presents the second huge headache for the authoritarian spin on events. China strives to present democracy as something inappropriate for many peoples, starting of course with the Chinese themselves. Whenever the subject of democracy in Taiwan is highlighted in the news in China it is to exhibit footage of brawls in the parliament. Disorder in China, it is implied, would not be so easily contained as a legislative shoe fight. It could engulf the entire country, leading to great violence and destruction, such as China has already experienced in living memory. The unsubtle idea here is to say that democracy leads to disorder. Better to keep your nose down, to maintain "harmony" and to pursue growth.

The thing is that despite repeated provocation by the police and by a president who, reluctant to depart, played with expectations and all but taunted the huge crowds in Cairo, those crowds refused to become a mob. The democratic revolution that is just beginning in Egypt has so far handsomely resisted becoming anything like the Cultural Revolution, which employed mass violence to overturn an existing order.

How then to disparage what is going on in Egypt? It is not an easy challenge, and the dangerous messages for the Authoritarian International, and its putative leader, China, have only just begun to be unpacked.

As hard as it has worked to discredit the universal applicability or appeal of democracy, Beijing has worked just as hard to conjure an alternate moral universe, one in which economics trumps all. Some Western analysts have even naively bought into the notion that if you just take care of growth, people will be willing to suspend all manner of other demands and happily leave governance to the mandarins.

In its beautiful complexity, Egypt gives the lie to all of this. A society in its entirety, from the lowliest workers to the privileged professional class, wants a cluster of goods: economic growth, transparency, accountability, and a say in who governs it. There are no either-ors in this formula, no contradictions. But there is a name. When you add it all up, you can call it dignity.