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CONFIDENTIAL

February 14, 2011

For: Hillary
 From: Sid
 Re: US mentor to Egyptian revolutionaries

The New York Times today discloses that youthful non-violent Egyptian revolutionaries have been inspired by the work of an American political thinker on non-violent resistance, Gene Sharp, who spent decades at Harvard. (See NYT article and bio of Sharp below.)

You might consider inviting him to see you and then sending him on a State Department USIS tour.

NYT:

Breaking free from older veterans of the Arab political opposition, they relied on tactics of nonviolent resistance channeled from an American scholar through a Serbian youth brigade — but also on marketing tactics borrowed from Silicon Valley.

For their part, Mr. Maher and his colleagues began reading about nonviolent struggles. They were especially drawn to a Serbian youth movement called Otpor, which had helped topple the dictator Slobodan Milosevic by drawing on the ideas of an American political thinker, Gene Sharp. The hallmark of Mr. Sharp's work is well-tailored to Mr. Mubark's Egypt: He argues that nonviolence is a singularly effective way to undermine police states that might cite violent resistance to justify repression in the name of stability.

The New York Times

February 13, 2011

Dual Uprisings Show Potent New Threats to Arab States

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK and DAVID E. SANGER

CAIRO — As protesters in Tahrir Square faced off against pro-government forces, they drew a lesson from their counterparts in Tunisia: “Advice to the youth of Egypt: Put vinegar or onion under your scarf for tear gas.”

The exchange on Facebook was part of a remarkable two-year collaboration that has given birth

In Washington that day, President Obama turned up, unexpectedly, at a 3:30 p.m. Situation Room meeting of his “principals,” the key members of the national security team, where he displaced Thomas E. Donilon, the national security adviser, from his seat at the head of the table.

The White House had been debating the likelihood of a domino effect since youth-driven revolts had toppled President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, even though the American intelligence community and Israel’s intelligence services had estimated that the risk to President Mubarak was low — less than 20 percent, some officials said.

According to senior officials who participated in Mr. Obama’s policy debates, the president took a different view. He made the point early on, a senior official said, that “this was a trend” that could spread to other authoritarian governments in the region, including in Iran. By the end of the 18-day uprising, by a White House count, there were 38 meetings with the president about Egypt. Mr. Obama said that this was a chance to create an alternative to “the Al Qaeda narrative” of Western interference.

American officials had seen no evidence of overtly anti-American or anti-Western sentiment. “When we saw people bringing their children to Tahrir Square, wanting to see history being made, we knew this was something different,” one official said.

On Jan. 28, the debate quickly turned to how to pressure Mr. Mubarak in private and in public — and whether Mr. Obama should appear on television urging change. Mr. Obama decided to call Mr. Mubarak, and several aides listened in on the line. Mr. Obama did not suggest that the 82-year-old leader step aside or transfer power. At this point, “the argument was that he really needed to do the reforms, and do them fast,” a senior official said. Mr. Mubarak resisted, saying the protests were about outside interference.

According to the official, Mr. Obama told him, “You have a large portion of your people who are not satisfied, and they won’t be until you make concrete political, social and economic reforms.”

The next day, the decision was made to send former Ambassador Frank G. Wisner to Cairo as an envoy. Mr. Obama began placing calls to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and other regional leaders.

The most difficult calls, officials said, were with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and Mr. Netanyahu, who feared regional instability and urged the United States to stick with Mr. Mubarak. According to American officials, senior members of the government in Saudi Arabia argued that the United States should back Mr. Mubarak even if he used force against the demonstrators. By Feb. 1, when Mr. Mubarak broadcast a speech pledging that he would not run again and that elections would be held in September, Mr. Obama concluded that the Egyptian president still had not gotten the message.

Within an hour, Mr. Obama called Mr. Mubarak again in the toughest, and last, of their conversations. “He said if this transition process drags out for months, the protests will, too,” one of Mr. Obama’s aides said.

Mr. Mubarak told Mr. Obama that the protests would be over in a few days.

Mr. Obama ended the call, the official said, with these words: “I respect my elders. And you have been in politics for a very long time, Mr. President. But there are moments in history when just because things were the same way in the past doesn’t mean they will be that way in the future.”