From the Dean

We live in an era of astonishing political transformation: from the Arab Spring to constitutional reform in Myanmar and the challenges of new democracies in Russia and the post-Communist world; from dynastic change in North Korea to friction over corruption and governance in China; from turmoil in Iraq and Afghanistan in the wake of American-led wars of counterinsurgency and occupation to violent uprisings in the face of state repression in Libya and Syria, from polarization and policy gridlock in the United States to electoral turmoil in Europe as financial crisis continues to unfold. Nearly a quarter century after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Soviet Union, the pace of political change around the world has accelerated and waves of political change have spread to all regions of the world.

These political transitions raise a host of urgent questions about the possibilities for economic development, the structure of global markets and institutions of economic governance, international security and the resolution of political conflicts, the stability of global energy systems, and the world’s capacity to meet basic human needs. What do these transitions mean? Why are they occurring, and how can they be managed so that societies around the world become more open, prosperous, and free while avoiding the often-savage repercussions of political conflict? What impact will they have at the local, national, regional, and global levels?

This issue of SIPA News gathers essays by some of SIPA’s most distinguished faculty members, accomplished students, and recent graduates, who consider just a few of the extraordinary political transitions that are now unfolding around the world. Each brings important issues into sharp relief; together, they highlight SIPA’s continued engagement in the most urgent and compelling issues of our time.

As this issue amply demonstrates, SIPA students, faculty, and alumni are engaged in thinking deeply about issues central to SIPA’s global public policy curriculum: human rights, conflict resolution, the interdependence of economic and political reform, the dynamics of regional politics, the legitimacy of elections, and the influence of the media (both social and conventional). They remind us of how much we still have to learn about the dynamics and consequences of political transitions. And they underscore the world’s urgent need for the kind of clear-minded, humane, and passionate global public servants who populate SIPA and its community of alumni.

Robert C. Lieberman
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North Korea after Kim Jong Il

BY CHARLES ARMSTRONG
Kim Jong Il's death last December triggered much speculation in the United States, South Korea, Japan, and elsewhere that North Korea was facing a period of instability, leadership in-fighting, and possibly collapse. It's worth remembering that many people predicted North Korea would not survive after Kim Il Sung's death in 1994, that the regime would collapse amid elite power struggles and popular unrest, and that Kim Jong Il could not possibly hold onto power. None of this came to pass, of course. Kim Jong Il led his isolated, impoverished country through a devastating famine in the late 1990s and a series of confrontations with the United States over North Korea's nuclear program. At the end of his life, Kim was preparing his youngest son Kim Jong Un to succeed him.
Over the past 40 years, North Korea has developed a political system inseparable from Kim family leadership. It is highly unlikely that Kim Jong Un can be pushed aside easily, even if real power is shared with others, and he begins his reign largely as a figurehead. Few outside observers thought dynastic communism could succeed when Kim Jong Il first came to power, and North Korea may confound world opinion again with a successful third-generation succession. But Kim Jong Un’s North Korea exists in a very different world from that of his grandfather, a world connected through electronic media, in which a protest in Tunisia can lead in short order to the collapse of a regime in Egypt and reverberate around the world. The life spans of dictators are becoming increasingly short.

North Korea has declared it will soon be a “powerful and prosperous nation,” and its new young leader has been promoted in the state media as an economic and technological modernizer. Such goals are incompatible with North Korea’s continued isolation, and it would be in the interests of all—not least the long-suffering North Korean people—if Kim Jong Un were to take on a new path of openness and reform. Of course, the regime is extremely cautious about opening up, but even the most isolated of regimes can change—as recently seen in Burma.

As a possible sign that North Korea is attempting to emerge from isolation, Pyongyang and Washington negotiated an important agreement in February, in which North Korea consented to to a moratorium on missile launches and nuclear tests, to halt nuclear activities at its main Yongbyon nuclear plant, and allow international inspectors back in the country to monitor its nuclear activities and confirm the disablement of its reactor at Yongbyon. In exchange, the United States promised nearly a quarter-million tons of food aid, reaffirmed that it bears “no hostile intent” toward North Korea, and reaffirmed its commitment to the September 2005 Joint Statement reached by the Six-Party Talks among North and South Korea, the United States, China, Russia, and Japan. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the agreement a “step forward,” but it was the first sign in almost three years, since the Six-Party Talks collapsed in April 2009, of improvement in U.S.-North Korea relations and reduction of tensions in the Northeast Asian region.

The February talks were followed two weeks later by a conference in New York, sponsored by Syracuse University, which brought scholars and government officials from Japan, Russia, China, South Korea, Germany, and Mongolia together in discussion with Americans and North Koreans. As a participant in the conference, I can attest that the discussions were wide ranging, very friendly, and very frank. The North Koreans seemed especially eager to put their relations with the United States on a new footing. We have heard this before, of course, going back to the first U.S.-North Korea talks in the 1990s, but it was not the message the North Koreans had been conveying in recent years. How far either side will be able to satisfy the concerns of the other, and ultimately normalize relations, remains to be seen. Both the Chinese and the North Korean participants stressed the importance of a simultaneous, “action-for-action” process. If North Korea demonstrates its nuclear freeze and allows inspectors in, while the United States eases some sanctions against Pyongyang, the February 2012 agreement could lead to another stage of improved relations not only bilaterally but in conjunction with a revived Six-Party Process.

Any significant opening in the North Korean system—to outside information, economic reform, or cultural influence—will have far-reaching and possibly destabilizing effects on the society and the regime. But for now, as Secretary of Defense William Perry said while negotiating with Pyongyang in the late 1990s, we have to deal with North Korea “as it is, not as we would like it to be.” And what it is now is a country under the leadership of the latest heir to the Kim dynasty, trying once again to engage—cautiously perhaps, and on its own terms, to be sure—with the outside world.

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A flurry of political and economic reforms beginning in 2010 and cresting in late 2011 and early 2012 has transformed the Southeast Asian nation of Myanmar, against all expectations, from pariah state to regional player. In one example of this rapid transformation, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was under house arrest as late as November 2010, was elected to parliament on April 1, 2012.

Prior to her release, Suu Kyi had spent 15 of the previous 21 years under arrest. Shortly afterward, she began touring the country as a candidate for parliament on the National League for Democracy (NLD) ticket. The government’s response to her campaign activities was mixed. It broadcast one of her speeches on state television for the first time, but not the part in which she criticized the country’s civil-liberties record. This is a dramatic shift from just a few years ago, when government censors would excise her name from newspapers, but is emblematic of the work-in-progress nature of Myanmar’s transformation.

Democracy leader Suu Kyi speaks at the National League for Democracy (NLD) party headquarters after winning her seat in the parliament and a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections, on April 2, 2012, Yangon, Myanmar.
Sean Turnell, an Australian economist and regional expert, said that the outcome of the April 2012 by-elections would “be a test of the true limits of what is sayable and askable under the new rules.” The NLD went on to win 43 of the 44 seats it contested, which will cement its status as the country’s primary opposition party. Though Suu Kyi and the NLD now have an official role in national politics, their influence on policy will be limited. They still hold relatively few seats in parliament and new elections will not happen until 2015. In addition, the country’s constitution guarantees that 25 percent of the seats in parliament must be controlled by military-backed parties, which makes it impossible to pass constitutional amendments without the consent of the military.

Myanmar is also seeking a new role for itself in regional politics. At a November 16, 2011, summit in Bali, neighboring countries decided that Myanmar deserves to assume the rotating chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, for the first time in 2014. This is a major victory for the country’s leaders, who were denied the chairmanship in 2006 because of international outrage over their human rights abuses. At the summit, ASEAN foreign ministers expressed optimism about Myanmar’s future because of its shaky steps toward democracy and its willingness to release political prisoners and loosen restrictions on political speech. However, many Western observers suspect that many reforms were calculated to snag the ASEAN chairmanship and do not represent a long-term shift in policy. Swedish journalist and long-time Myanmar watcher Bertil Lintner insists that these changes “have nothing to do with democratization. [President] Thein Sein is not some kind of Burmese Gorbachev.”

Myanmar, also known as Burma, was governed by various military dictatorships from 1962 to 2010 and is one of the least developed countries in the world, despite its wealth of natural resources. In November 2010, the ruling military junta announced that it would hold parliamentary elections and step down from power, though many observers in the international community were skeptical. During the last round of elections in 1990, when a pro-democracy party unexpectedly won a majority of seats in parliament, the junta annulled the results, imprisoned the winners, and killed thousands of protestors.

To avoid repeating this outcome, the military junta organized the 2010 elections under a constitution that guaranteed victory for military-controlled parties. Amid widespread charges of fraud at the polls, the winning party organized a new civilian-led government headed by Thein Sein, a former military officer.

David Steinberg, a specialist on Myanmar at Georgetown University, says that “even though the elections were a sham, the fact is that today one
can do and say things that were unthinkable before. Censorship is on the decline." Through regional legislatures, the beginnings of political pluralism are emerging for minority populations along the border. "That has never existed before," he noted.

The pace of political reform began increasing in October 2011, just ahead of the ASEAN summit, when the government released more than 200 political prisoners, halted construction of a dam despised by the public, and engaged in high-level meetings with U.S. diplomats and with Suu Kyi.

In a November 16, 2011, editorial in the Washington Post, a representative from President Thein Sein’s office called for closer relations with the United States and for support for Myanmar’s bid to chair ASEAN. “China ascended to the world stage with the Beijing Olympics. The ASEAN chair is Myanmar’s opportunity to step forward," he said. As Steinberg points out, "In the lead up to the Beijing Olympics, the Chinese were on the hook in the eyes of the world. In the same way, Myanmar is on the hook to keep up the good behavior between now and 2014.”

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called these reforms the “first stirrings of change in decades” and committed the United States to partner with Myanmar if it continued to reform. In December 2011, she became the first American secretary of state in 56 years to visit the country. In subsequent months, the United States announced the resumption of full diplomatic relations with Myanmar and is reconsidering its use of economic sanctions to boost bilateral engagement.

It remains unclear what motivates President Thein Sein and why change is happening so quickly. Some analysts like Bertil Lintner claim that Myanmar is playing regional politics, distancing itself from China by opening to the rest of the world. Sean Turnell contends that no matter how you interpret events, “there is a positive shift under way. Incomplete yes, fragile certainly, but I think it is safe to say that certain elements within the new government, including the president, are of a reformist bent.”

President Sein is an unlikely figure for pursuing radical reform. He was a dutiful if unambitious career officer in the military junta for 40 years and even did his part waging war against Myanmar’s ethnic minorities. However, as one journalist in the long-repressed Shan State recounted to the New York Times, Sein was “less cruel” than others—“he was the commander that people hated the least.”

Unlike many junta leaders, Sein traveled outside the country with some frequency in these years as a representative to the United Nations and elsewhere, and some have guessed that exposure to modern economies inspired him to reform Myanmar’s economic and monetary policies, opening the country to investment from the rest of the world.

Whatever the reason for the recent political and economic opening, policymakers inside and outside Myanmar should bear in mind that—despite the overwhelming victory of Suu Kyi and the NLD at the polls—the hard work of reform has only begun. Supporters of democracy face an uphill path to self-governance that is clearer than it has been in a generation, but there will surely be setbacks along the way.

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Cuban president Raul Castro attends the May Day celebration on May 1, 2011, in Santiago de Cuba, Cuba.
Is a Cuban Spring on the Horizon?

BY CHRISTOPHER REEVE

We support the Egyptian people and their valiant fight for their political rights and social justice.”

Fidel Castro wrote these words of praise on February 13, 2011, two days after Egyptian protestors ousted their leader of three decades, Hosni Mubarak, the second head of state to be removed in the Arab Spring uprisings that are still going on.

Fidel Castro, triumphant leader of the Cuban Revolution, led Cuba from 1959 until 2006, when he handed the reins of power to his brother Raul. Castro’s 47-year tenure as Cuba’s leader is longer than that of any of the ousted Arab leaders, or those currently fighting for their lives, political or otherwise.

When opposition forces apparently killed Muammar Qaddafi, a long-time Castro ally, in October 2011, Castro offered no words of praise for the Libyan people.

Although Fidel Castro is in many ways out of the Cuban political scene due to illness, Cuba remains a state in which basic civil rights are denied, access to information beyond official propaganda is heavily restricted, and a one-party system with unchanging leadership holds all the power, continually arresting and imprisoning those who voice dissent.

But a moribund economy, increasing access to digital technologies, increased contact with Miami Cubans, and a growing national frustration may bring Cuba in line with the world’s current trend against undemocratic rule.

Perhaps fearing a fate similar to Qaddafi’s, or simply because of the ineffectiveness of the command economy, Raul Castro has opened the private sector to levels not seen in Cuba since the early 1960s. Many Cubans can now operate small businesses and buy and sell their homes. Although critics say that the Cuban government’s tax rate makes the new freedoms dysfunctional and that the new policies are simply not enough, optimistic Cuba watchers say that the changes are unprecedented in the history of Communist Cuba.

Marifeli Pérez-Stable, a professor at Florida International University’s Cuban Research Institute (CRI), tells of recent agricultural reforms undertaken even before the Arab Spring. After becoming Cuba’s president in 2008, Raul Castro ushered in reforms that now allow Cuban peasants to determine what to grow on parcels of land leased to them by the government. The peasants’ children can later inherit the lease. If a house is built on the land and the children don’t want it, the government will compensate them for the house and take back the land.

“This is minutia-type information. But in my knowledge of Cuba over 50 years, I can’t think of another example in which the Cuban government, instead of closing the market, is opening it,” Pérez-Stable says. “All the measures, modest as they may seem, are in fact everything that Fidel Castro repudiated, and probably still does.”

“The very modest economic reforms [that are] happening—people are taking them very seriously. That, in and of itself, is a big change,” she concludes.

While Cuba has seen an economic opening since Fidel Castro ceded power, the island’s political sphere has remained rigid. But the Cuban security apparatus is facing increasing difficulty in repressing popular dissent.

“The fear is going away,” says Uva de Aragon, writer and former associate director of CRI. She says that Cuba’s leadership is currently facing a crossroads of discontent and loss of fear by the Cuban people.

A YouTube video shot on August 23, 2011, shows four women protesting on the steps of the...

What is particularly noteworthy in the video is that the crowd that gathered to watch the protestors heckled the first security official to arrive. They jeered and yelled “Shameless!” and “Abuser!” Eventually, a team of security officials carried the women away. Many of the onlookers recorded the events with their mobile phones, a scene quite common in Arab Spring countries.

In 2006, the Cuban government, in an effort to increase revenues, allowed more Cubans access to cellular phone service. When U.S. president Barack Obama removed restrictions on remittances and travel to Cuba by Cuban-Americans in 2009, large numbers of Cubans on the island suddenly had access to cellular phones and the means to pay for the service.

According to Cuba’s National Office of Statistics, 9 percent of Cuba’s 11.2 million people had cellular phone plans in 2010. If one considers the extent to which landline phones are shared by family members and neighbors, the percentage of Cubans with access to cellular phones is surely greater than the number of plan subscribers.

CRI’s visiting assistant director, Juan Blanco, speaks of the potential of digital technologies to empower Cubans. “Now lots of people have smartphones with cameras and video capacity. If they see something and are willing to take the risk with cameras and video, they can report [it].”

Dr. Blanco says that videos make it to flash drives and are then shared on the island. Now rumors of uprisings can be substantiated. This sharing of information reduces the sense of isolation on the part of regime critics. Pictures and videos then reach the Internet, although still largely inaccessible in Cuba, and its global audience.

Members of Miami’s Cuban American National Foundation believe that the safety of dissidents is increased if the international community is aware of their status and travails. Daniel Lafuente, the organization’s media coordinator, says of Cuban bloggers whose voices have made it online, “[They’re] not going to be imprisoned for three years because the international community would be outraged.”

Yoani Sánchez, perhaps the best known of Cuba’s bloggers, although prevented from leaving Cuba, is tolerated by the Cuban government. Her blogs bring the realities of life in Cuba to an international audience. Sánchez’s 2009 book, Havana Real, a compilation of her blogs, informs readers about things like food scarcity and the dysfunctional state of Cuban hospitals.

Among the factors Dr. de Aragon says contribute to a loss of fear in Cuba is the “demythification of the leaders of the Revolution.” The aging leaders of the Cuban government have simply failed to produce the society they promised. And without the capacity to open ports to mass emigration as occurred in 1980 with the Mariel Boatlift, and in the 1990s with the Cuban rafters, discontent stays on the island. Furthermore, with family members visiting from Miami with tales of a better life, as well as TVs equipped with satellite reception, Cubans know that their centrally planned reality is a global anomaly.

The October 2011 report on politically motivated detentions of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCHRNR)
With family members visiting from Miami with tales of a better life, as well as TVs equipped with satellite reception, Cubans know that their centrally planned reality is a global anomaly.

Cuban authorities refused to give a travel visa to Yoani Sánchez in Havana, Cuba, in 2008, so she could receive one of Spain’s top journalism awards in Madrid, said Spanish newspaper El País, which hands out the awards annually.

says that the Cuban government’s 563 plus detentions last September was the highest figure for any month in the last 30 years. The group recorded 2,074 detentions for 2010, and 2,784 for 2011 up to September, a growth of more than 35 percent.

José Azel, a senior scholar at the University of Miami’s Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies (ICCAS), says, notwithstanding the economic changes, “[Raul Castro] has been absolutely steadfast that there will be no political change.” Dr. Azel mentions the increase in arrests of dissidents.

While the September 2011 figure of 563 detentions might simply mean an increased crackdown on dissent by the Cuban government, in fact that is only half the story. CCHRNR’s Havana-based founder, Elizardo Sánchez, says the upward trend in detentions is connected to both “an increase in the number of protestors and more government repression.”

The CCHRNR report documents the detentions as lasting from one hour to a few days (one detention was at day six at the time the data was entered). The relatively short durations of these detentions are a break from the past.

“They haven’t really been condemning people to long prison sentences like in 2003, when the Black Spring happened,” Dr. Pérez-Stable notes, referring to the Cuban government’s arrest and sentencing of 75 dissidents. After international condemnation, including EU sanctions, the Catholic Church negotiated the release of the remaining 52 Black Spring political prisoners in July 2010. Most detainees had been sentenced to 20-year prison terms, and the rest to longer and shorter terms.

Lawyer and former political prisoner René Gomez Manzano, of the Cuban Democratic Alliance, believes that there is still room for more public dissent. He says that the majority of Cubans have not yet adopted an attitude conducive to bringing about real political change. “I would say that 90 percent of Cubans would like to leave Cuba. Those that stay adopt a passive attitude. They don’t manifest interest in bringing change,” he says from Havana. “The attitude they assume is one of tolerance for the system and of not bringing trouble upon oneself.”

“That type of attitude is the dominant one,” Gomez Manzano concludes.

Dr. Azel, of ICCAS, says that change will likely come from within the Cuban government, when both Castro brothers are out of the way. “At some point a reformer will emerge, a Gorbachev of some sort,” but, he warns, “That is not what is in the cards at this moment.”

When Fidel Castro expressed his support for Egyptian protestors, the Mubarak trial had not yet commenced. By now, members of the Cuban government, including the Castro brothers, must have acknowledged to some extent that if a Tahrir Square-style movement removes them from power, there may be legal repercussions for past crimes. And Cubans are cognizant of this possibility.

In the YouTube video of the protestors, one observer yelled at the first security official to arrive at the scene: “The day this falls, we are going to lock up all of the shameless persons!”

CRI’s Dr. Blanco, a historian, while acknowledging that change in Cuba may very well occur in a few years from within the island’s politburo, sees another possibility as well.

“Societies that seem to be as stable as a rock can crumble all of a sudden when a little spark that seems to come from nowhere contains emotions that have been held back for a long time.”

Of Cuba, he says, “The potential for a minor spark to transform itself into a major fire is there.”

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I VOTE
Liberté I VOTE
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JE vote
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THE IMMANENT FRAME

BY ALFRED C. STEPAN

According to Jean Daniel, the French commentator and founder of Novel Observateur, Tunisia’s October 2011 elections amount to a “counterrevolution” because a Muslim party won a plurality of seats in parliament. Such an assertion should be entirely rethought.

Of course, for many French secularists, elections could only count as a revolution if they had followed the French 1905 model of laïcité, the most religiously “unfriendly” form of secularism of any West European democracy. Such a model was imposed by the authoritarian secularist regimes of Habib Bourguiba and Ben Ali, who ruled Tunisia without free elections from independence in 1956 until the Arab Spring. Having witnessed, and written about, more than 15 efforts at democratic transitions and having visited Tunisia three times since the start of the Arab Spring, I would argue the opposite: A much more appropriate description of the political situation in Tunisia is to call it the Arab Spring’s first completed democratic transition.

A man stands outside the international press center in Tunis on October 22, 2011, on the eve of historic national elections in Tunisia.
Fifteen years ago my colleague Juan Linz and I, in our book *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*, spelled out four necessary requirements for a successful democratic transition. First, sufficient agreement has to be reached about political procedures to produce an elected government. Second, a government has to come to power as the direct result of a free and popular vote. Third, this government *de facto* has to have the authority to generate new policies. Fourth, the executive, legislative, and judicial power generated by the new democracy must not have to share power with other bodies *de jure* (e.g., the military or a religious power). By the end of 2011, Tunisia had met all four of these requirements. In contrast, Egypt had not met even one.

How has this been achieved in Tunisia? There is a deep backstory involved here that is only now being publicly documented and which I spell out in much greater detail in an April 2012 article in the *Journal of Democracy*. However, the essence of the story is the gradual construction of a democratic and relatively consensual opposition, involving both secularists and the religiously-based Muslim party, Ennahda, which carried the recent elections, a construction that began eight years before the fall of Ben Ali. A strikingly similar process of political *rapprochement* and commitment to nonviolence and democracy began in Chile in the 1980s, involving the secular Socialist Party and the religiously-based Christian Democratic Party, roughly eight years before they defeated Pinochet in an election and formed a successful ruling coalition.

In June 2003, representatives of four of the five largest political parties with the greatest number of seats in Tunisia’s current Constituent Assembly met in France to launch a “Call from Tunis” (*Appel de Tunis*). The participants agreed that any future, elected government would be “founded on the sovereignty of the people as the sole source of legitimacy” and be “religiously neutral.” Another principle agreed on in the “Call from Tunis” concerned gender equality. One of the accomplishments of Bourguiba was the creation of the Arab world’s most egalitarian family code that, among many other things, granted the right of women to initiate a divorce, and to receive compulsory child support. In 2008, these four political parties from Tunisia met again, and reaffirmed and even deepened their commitment to the principles of the “Call from Tunis.”

Within days after Ben Ali was overthrown, the interim government created a new organization to put in order the procedures for a rapid presidential election. Protests against the exclusion of all but technical, legal advisers from the organization led to a new body representing all the political parties and civil society, the “High Commission for the Fulfillment of Revolutionary Goals, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition,” generally called after its chairman, Ben Achour. This commission is one of the most successful and consensual organizations in the history of crafting a democratic transition. Nothing remotely like it has yet been created in Egypt, where the military, via the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (SCAF), until recently has structured all significant political dialogue via more than 150 unilaterally issued communiqués.

In November 2011, I talked at length with Ben Achour, with members of the political parties in the commission, and with leaders of civil society organizations, as well as with two of the expert (but nonvoting) legal advisers to Ben Achour’s staff. I was also given the key documents the commission had voted upon. Here are the main decisions:

1. Though many changes were considered to be important for improving Tunisia, it was agreed to concentrate only on decisions that were indispensable for creating a democratic government to make these changes.

2. It was decided that the first election to be held would be to create a Constituent Assembly, whose task would be to produce a new constitution.

3. It was agreed that the Constituent Assembly would appoint a government, which would thus be based on the legitimacy of elections and also be responsible to the Constituent Assembly.

4. It was agreed that the electoral system would be one of proportional representation, with every other name on the ballot being a woman. By all accounts the first party to accept this gender parity provision was the Muslim-inspired Ennahda.
To ensure that all the contesting parties have confidence in the fairness of the electoral results, it was decided to create Tunisia’s first ever independent electoral commission and to invite many international electoral observers and give them extensive monitoring prerogatives. In sharp contrast, in Egypt, SCAF initially unilaterally denied the entry of international observers, on the grounds that their presence in the country would amount to a violation of Egypt’s sovereignty. Eventually, SCAF allowed into the country some election “followers,” whose number and prerogatives were substantially less than in Tunisia.

On the issue of what to do with Ben Ali’s official political party, the Assembly decided to ban the party and some of its most important leaders from being candidates in the first election. However, in order not to exclude a large group of citizens from participating in the first free elections, the Assembly declared that former Ben Ali party members and/or supporters were free to form new parties.

On April 11, 2011, approximately 155 members of the Ben Achour Commission voted on this package of measures to create a democratic transition. The vote count was the following: two walk outs, two abstentions and 150 in favor of the package. The negotiations and vote together intensified feelings of solidarity.

Democracy is always only “government pro tem” and always has some dangers that must be guarded against by democratic rules, a non-majoritarian constitution that protects minority rights, a vigilant judiciary, and a free press.

Tunisia’s new democracy, building upon the consensually agreed April 11 decisions, and the electors’ voting decisions, has a reasonable number of credible constraints in place.

A crucial democratic constraint is that Ennahda, with 40 percent of the seats in the Constituent Assembly, has had to form a coalition with two secular parties in order to get the necessary 50 percent plus 1 majority to form a government. If Ennahda were to ever succumb to pressures from Islamist militants in its base, it would probably be in the interest of the two secular parties in the coalition to withdraw from the ruling coalition. Ennahda, in the de facto parliamentary setting created by the April 11 laws, could even lose its control of the Constituent Assembly.

Another major constraint is that there is agreement among virtually all the opposition and the government party leaders I talked to—including Ahmed Nejib El Chebbi, the leader of the most important secular party, the Progressive Democratic Party—that the elections were in fact free and fair. Crucially, Chebbi went on to say he was certain that free and fair elections would actually be held again in 12 to 18 months, after the Constituent Assembly has completed its work. He predicts that, given the problems of the world economy, and the great pressure on Ennahda to deliver on its economic promises, a broader coalition of opposition parties will have a serious chance to form a government after the next round of elections.

Chebbi, and indeed virtually all the party leaders I talked to, now see elections as “the only game in town” for acquiring political power. This political incentive-based assumption, in itself, is one of the things Linz and I argued long ago is necessary for a democracy. The vast majority of political party leaders I talked to praised the work of the Independent Electoral Commission and the role of international election observers and want, and expect, them to play an important role in the next elections.

Tunisia is not Algeria in 1992, nor France in 1905. Nor is Tunisia in the throes of a counter-revolution. Tunisia may not be putting in place the French-style, 1905 form of hard, secular democracy that some secularists seem implicitly to prefer, but it is undergoing a democratic transition, one in which secular party leaders and religiously-based leaders in Ennahda are crafting new and promising forms of democratic contestation.

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The Coup to End All Coups: Fiji’s Crooked Path to Democracy

BY MOLLY POWERS

Military commander Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama is silhouetted in profile as he makes a statement at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks criticizing Australian foreign minister Alexander Downer for urging Fijians to oppose the regime in the Fijian capital, Suva, on December 11, 2006.
he “Coup to End All Coup”s began quietly in the small, coastal village of Naiserelagi. To me and to the villagers around me, the change in government seemed about as noteworthy as the change in weather. “Man, it sure is hot today,” they would say in passing. “Yes, and did you hear about the coup?” I had been living and working in Naiserelagi as a Peace Corps Volunteer since 2005. I continued organizing community projects and corresponding as usual with friends and family about all that was happening—or not happening—in Fiji.

The events unfolding a five-hour bus ride away in Fiji’s capital of Suva, however, were not as serene. On December 6, 2006, a military coup overthrew the country’s democratically elected government. The high commissioners of Australia and New Zealand were immediately deported for backing the ousted prime minister, as was the outspoken editor-in-chief of The Fiji Times. Protesters were arrested and detained for days in military camps. Decrees were passed prohibiting gatherings of more than ten people, the Great Council of Chiefs was disbanded, and the Annual Methodist Church Conference was canceled. Armed military men roamed the streets, a curfew prevented people traveling after dark, and checkpoints were set up along all major highways to monitor prominent people’s movements. Media outlets were forbidden from carrying any government-related news. Suddenly, journalists were scrambling for human-interest stories.

My carefree experience of the post-coup days began to change as the interim government’s grip on the country tightened. One morning in 2007, while working on corporate social responsibility programs for the U.S.-based Fiji Water brand, the managing director phoned in earnest. “Have you written about the coup in your blog?” he asked me. “Our people in L.A. saw it. You need to take that down immediately. You could be thrown out of the country.”

Then in April 2009, the military government declared a state of emergency and instituted martial law following the abrogation of Fiji’s 1997 constitution. Shortly thereafter, a friend, Dr. Padma Lal, an environmentalist and academic who had been vocally opposed to the government’s actions, was detained when trying to reenter Fiji from Australia. They sent her back on the next plane, and she has not been allowed to return.
When I left Fiji to begin my studies at Columbia in August 2010, it was with a heavy heart, but also with a sense of relief that I had made it out unscathed. Many were not so lucky, including my former boss, who was deported in November 2010.

The December 2006 coup was only the latest of several that had occurred in Fiji since it gained independence from Great Britain in 1970. The first two took place in 1987 and were followed by a third in 2000. Each coup has played out according to a similar pattern, with the military in a starring role. In each instance a charismatic leader with inside army connections has leveraged his status, mobilized the military, and forcefully overthrown the democratic government of the day.

Fiji is home to one of the smallest militaries in the world, the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF). Although it faces little threat of attack—most of Fiji’s island neighbors have no military at all—it is nonetheless a potent force. Established in World War II when Fiji was threatened in the Pacific Theater, the RFMF today has 3,500 active servicemen and women and contributes more than 600 soldiers to UN Peacekeeping missions in Iraq, Sinai, Sudan, and Liberia. These peacekeepers have represented an important source of income for Fiji.

But the RFMF represents more than a security or financial investment. Fiji is historically a nation of warriors. Long before the country was ceded to Great Britain in 1874, Fiji was an epicenter of Pacific intertribal warfare. This is evident even in the language: Fiji’s primary Bauan dialect has at least ten different verbs that mean “to beat with a club.”

Another important fact about the RFMF is its lack of racial diversity. At the time of the first coup in 1987, the RFMF was 98 percent indigenous Fijian, but nationwide demographics were closer to 45 percent indigenous Fijian, 55 percent Indo-Fijian.

Interracial power dynamics have been and continue to be at the heart of Fiji’s political instability. Indians began arriving in Fiji in 1879 to work on British sugar cane plantations as indentured laborers. While an Indo-Fijian identity developed over
"He is the best thing to happen to this country," the director of a major telecom, who asked not to be named, confided. "He got rid of the Great Council of Chiefs—better known as 'thieves.' He's shown to us that his motives are in the best interests of the country."

time, interracial marriage with indigenous Fijians was rare until very recently and is still discouraged among more traditional families.

Throughout the 20th century, as Indo-Fijians grew in number and in socioeconomic means, the indigenous Fijians began to sense a threat. "Look at how the Red Indians in the United States, the Aboriginals in Australia, and the Maori in New Zealand have lost their land," the chief of Naseseragali, Ratu Meli Tovolo, often reminded me. The so-called "Taukei Movement" embraced these growing nationalist sentiments and helped fuel the 1987 and 2000 coups. "Taukei" is the Bavan word for "native." During these coups, Indo-Fijians became targets for civil violence, their stores and homes vandalized. After the coups they fled en masse.

"My son is in school so he can be an engineer or an accountant and go to Australia," Prabjot Singh, a rural Indian farmer, told me before the 2006 coup. "I don't want him to be a farmer. I want than a Fiji with a truly democratic government based on ethnicity... There is nothing more acceptable Fijians little, their memories of the violence of the 2006 coup wiped clean. Many are even more anguish, I found a very different situation.

He is the best thing to happen to this country, " the director of a major telecom, who asked not to be named, confided. "He got rid of the Great Council of Chiefs—better known as 'thieves.' He's shown to us that his motives are in the best interests of the country. Fiji needs a strong hand, like a child. He keeps his people in line. Crime is under control." Similar refrains were echoed among my friends and former colleagues at all levels of the private and public sectors. Where only one year earlier there had been resentment and fear, appreciation for the interim government had now grown.

"Have you seen the roads up to Ra?" corporate accountant Shirley Tuisese, 58, exclaimed when we met. "They're almost fully paved. The government has accomplished so much in so little time!"

"We're very happy the government has funded the road project, they upgraded the health center, and they've brought electricity all the way up through Tokaimalo district. That's more than any other government could do," Ratu Meli, 72, told me when I visited.

Even my fiancé, Timoci Tora, 38, defended Bainimarama to me. "When I was growing up, I could never dream of getting a government scholarship. Those only went to the sons of chiefs and prominent people. Bainimarama believes in merit-based equality. He himself is not a chief, he worked hard to be where he is."

Bainimarama's public relations team has successfully recast the man as a "benevolent dictator" of a Singaporean ilk. Following a severe slump between 2007 and 2009, the economy has indeed improved in the past two years, thanks to increased tourism and soft loans from Beijing for major infrastructure projects. The country saw GDP growth leap from 1.4 percent in 2009 to 7.2 percent in 2010. Even Australia seems to be softening its tough stance in the interests of maintaining regional influence and has promised to double bilateral aid to US$37 million in 2013 and 2014.

In his 2012 New Year's speech to the people of Fiji, Bainimarama announced an end to martial law, saying it was time to lay the constitutional groundwork for national elections in 2014. "The constitution must establish a truly democratic system based on the principle of one person, one vote, one value. We will not have a system that will classify Fijians based on ethnicity... There is nothing more I want than a Fiji with a truly democratic government, one representative of all Fijians.

For the first time in our history, we are on the path to making this a reality."

That path has taken more than a few twists and turns. With his recent public relations successes, few doubt that Bainimarama will be the likely winner of the 2014 election. This reality seems to bother Fijians little, their memories of the violations of the 2006 coup wiped clean. Many are even praising this Coup to End All Coups.

Is it selective amnesia, the Stockholm syndrome, tropical apathy, or a sort of coup-weariness that has set in among Bainimarama's opponents?

The year 2012 may yet hold genuine progress toward Bainimarama's now lofty goals. But it could also be a year of empty promises and protracted deadlines. Whatever the outcome, there is an unfortunate irony to an autocratic leader of a formerly democratic country cheering that country's soon-to-be democratic future—a future that will almost surely still be under his control.

Molly Powers is a second-year MPA in Development Practice candidate, co-founder of SIPA Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, and a Global Island Partnership Fellow.
The Power of the Individual in Political Transitions: An Interview with Carne Ross

BY MICHELLE CHAHINE

The biggest wave of revolutions and political transitions in recent years was sparked, quite literally, by a street vendor. When Mouhamad Bouazizi set himself on fire in Tunisia on December 17, 2010, out of extreme frustration with how he was treated by police officers who had confiscated his goods, several factors were uniquely aligned to lead to the series of revolutions and political change that were to follow: economic hardship, high unemployment among youth, decades of repression and oppression, a populace willing and ready to act, and the new role of digital media. However, it was the act of one individual that triggered the chain reaction of protests that toppled four governments and resulted in many more political transitions across the Middle East.
While the extreme act of self-immolation should not become the standard for creating change, the act of one individual—and the individuals who acted immediately afterward to spread the video of Bouazizi’s immolation, share information, organize and attend protests—reflects a deeper, greater truth: the power of ordinary people, to affect change, create necessary political transitions, and impact international affairs.

Carne Ross, a former British diplomat who resigned over the Iraq war in 2004, explores this idea in his latest book, The Leaderless Revolution: How Ordinary People Will Take Power and Change Politics in the 21st Century (Simon & Schuster). Published in the UK in September 2011, the book was written before the Arab Spring had taken off. And while he focused on change in Western society and Western democracy, Ross was prescient: individuals could and would self-organize to create political transitions and change.

“The fundamental argument that I’m making in this book is that authority and hierarchy are not going to manage our problems anymore,” says Ross in a telephone interview. “I’m not against organization. I’m not for anarchy. I’m just for self-organization—for that organization to be driven from the bottom up by people’s convictions.”

Ross uses the metaphor of “the wave” to explain how this “self-organization” occurs. He writes in his book:

It takes no instruction or authority to initiate the rolling wave of spectators standing up and lifting their arms at a sports stadium. One or two people might try to start a wave. If others around them follow, the wave can quickly ripple around the stadium, involving tens of thousands of people in an utterly spontaneous yet coordinated act. The point is a clear one: the person most important in influencing change may be the person standing right next to you.

This image of the wave rippling through a stadium is essentially what happened across the Middle East during the Arab Spring and across the world with the “Occupy” movement.

The protests within each of the “Arab Spring” countries followed a similar pattern: there was always someone, or a small group of people, who took the first step to start that “wave.” One of the most famous examples is Google executive Wael Ghonim from Egypt. He set up a Facebook page in the summer of 2010 called “We are all Khaled Said,” to honor a young man who had been beaten to death by the Egyptian police. Many view this Facebook page as one of the sparks that led to the January 2011 protests in Tahrir Square.

The role of new media is undeniable in its power to magnify what individuals can now do on their own. “New media offers an extraordinary form of organization and a way for people of common interest to meet and to organize themselves,” says Ross. “I met a Tunisian the other day who’d been a really central part in the revolution there, and he called the revolution in Tunisia a Facebook Revolution. And that’s a really, really important new development.”

However, Ross emphasizes throughout his book—something that we witnessed throughout the Arab Spring—that pressing a “like” button online is not enough. “That meeting on the Web, that connection through social media, is not itself change,” he says. “Just because you form a million-strong movement on the Web, does not mean you’ve actually changed anything until you’ve changed things in the real world.”

Ross, who is also a member of Occupy Wall Street’s Alternative Banking Working Group, says that one challenge of the Occupy movement is to become more than an online or protest movement. Rather, they must set up new political and economic systems, such as a cooperative bank, and inspire others in the mainstream to follow. “We meet every week, and we slave away. And it is hard,” Ross says of the efforts to set up this new bank. “I think this reveals a kind of deeper truth: it’s not easy to make things different. It takes an awful lot of detailed work.”

This is contrary to what we’ve been led to believe before. “We’ve been presented with myths that political change is easy,” he adds. “All you do is vote for this person or sign that petition and you will produce change. I don’t think that’s true anymore. I don’t think it was ever true.”

Perhaps, these myths are what made people feel powerless in the past. Individual political action, for the most part, was casting a vote a certain way. However, Ross adds: “If people mobilize in their own local circumstances to change things, they are likely to achieve far more than merely voting for one man in a deeply corrupted political system.”

Throughout the Arab Spring, no singular leader emerged from the protests. Perhaps that is why the TIME Magazine 2011 “Person of the Year” was a faceless protester. There was no specific person to single out and name the leader, and figures like Ghonim have rejected leadership labels. This has rung true in the Occupy movement as well. Many people are no longer looking for individual leaders who can bring about change or create political transitions.

“That’s been very much the conventional model that we refer to,” says Ross. “We think that is how political change happens, that one great figure emerges. It’s the ‘great man theory’ of history: these individuals emerge and we all turn to them … We tend to look at leaders and outstanding individuals for inspiration, when in fact inspiration and change can be much more ordinary and day-to-day and actually, therefore, much more enduring.”

People across the globe are starting to take things into their own hands. The year 2011 was one of protest, of self-organization to demand change. It was also arguably the year with the greatest number of political upheavals and transitions in recent history. These transitions were not created by elected officials or governments. They were driven by ordinary individuals with newfound power and voices.

“We have no choice but to confront the fact that governments are in decline, or less and less able to manage the problems that most concern us,” notes Ross. “There is therefore no choice but to confront these problems ourselves, and in fact all along we were much more powerful than we ever realized in dealing with them.”

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There is, however, another side to the new political environment that shows a very different picture. Putin, who has been leading Russia as president or prime minister for more than a decade, is still in power. Following the election, he returned to the presidency, a job he held before becoming prime minister. In addition, the parliament is still dominated by the United Russia Party. The more powerful opposition parties are still Communists and nationalists rather than liberals or democrats, and political and financial power is still intensely concentrated in the hands of Putin and his close allies. These two different faces, or interpretations, of recent events in Russia demonstrate the tension between change and continuity that characterizes political development as well as perceptions of political development in Russia and elsewhere.

Political change makes headlines, and sometimes even history, but political continuity is an equally valuable tool for explaining politics in countries like Russia. Accordingly, in looking at these election-related events in Russia, new developments such as the size of the demonstrations or the opening in Russia’s media receive more of our attention, while those elements that we have come to expect in Russia—the ease with which the government arrests and harasses opposition activists, the relative weakness of opposition political movements and parties, or the regularity with which election fraud occurs—are more easily overlooked. However, it is the latter that may be more significant and provide a better sense of what to expect in Russia.

In the former Soviet Union, demonstrations
following fraudulent elections have led to regime change, as in Georgia in 2003 and Kyrgyzstan in 2005 or the overturning of an election victory, as in Ukraine in 2004. These “Color Revolutions,” as they are known, overshadow the cases of Azerbaijan in 2003 or Belarus in both 2006 and 2010, where sizable demonstrations following a fraudulent election led to no change at all. The regimes that stole the elections remained in power, despite moments during the demonstrations when it looked like real change might occur. Even in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, where regime change did occur, continuity was strong as the new regimes fell considerably short of the promise for democracy that they held when they first came to power.

It is of course impossible to know with any certainty what Russia will look like a year from now. Putin’s regime could collapse, giving way to any number of possibilities, or Putin could find his footing and manage to stay in power for the next few years, as he no doubt would like to do. Despite the uncertainty, a good place to start in predicting how a country might look in a year is to think how it looked a year ago. This is the power of continuity, and while less dramatic or sexy than revolution or change, it can offer a better guideline for political evolution or, more accurately, for stagnancy.

This is not to suggest that nothing has changed in Russia; something obviously has. However, turning weaknesses in a once invulnerable seeming regime—such as a significant decline in Putin’s popularity and the confidence and excitement generated by the rediscovered freedom protest—into meaningful and enduring political change is quite difficult. In recent years in many corners of the world, we have seen that even initial successes in these areas rarely lead to lasting change, because the residual power of authoritarianism and the old ways of politics are very strong.

While Putin has fewer political resources to draw on than before, he still has strong ties to the economic engines that are critical to Russia—control over the security forces and enough influence over the media to crack down on dissent and reaffirm his control over Russia, at least for the short term. Putin’s longer-term prospects may not be as good. If the economy continues to decline and if his personal popularity cannot be restored, staying in power over the next three to ten years will, indeed, be extremely challenging.

It is therefore still possible that Putin’s decision to become president again after a four-year hiatus as prime minister will prove to be the last straw for a Russian population, particularly the growing, educated middle class, that is increasingly tired of being treated as subjects in what can seem like Putin’s personal and vast fiefdom. The end of Putin’s time as leader of Russia, should it come, would be a welcome development in many parts of Russia and the world, but if the history of continuity tells us anything, it is that the path to something approaching democracy and freedom in Russia will still be a very long and arduous journey, with no guarantee of success.

Lincoln Mitchell is an associate research scholar at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University.
Countries often take decades to transition from authoritarianism into established democracies. But how long does it take for a democratic country to turn into an authoritarian one? If events in Hungary since 2010 are any guide, authoritarianism can come surprisingly quickly.

The first warning signs came in 2006. Socialist prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány had just been reelected and an economic crisis was beginning to develop. A voice recording was leaked to the press in which Gyurcsány admitted that he and his party had lied about the nation’s economic situation. This recording—and Gyurcsány’s subsequent unwillingness to resign—ignited a series of demonstrations marked by the brutality of police and protesters alike.

The biggest winner was Viktor Orbán, the country’s populist former prime minister from 1998 to 2002, whose Fidesz party managed to convince the majority of the population that he alone could help the country overcome its economic and moral crisis. In 2010, Orbán was reelected by an overwhelming majority. This enabled Fidesz to take two-thirds of the seats in parliament, write a new constitution, and change almost any law without the consent of the other parties. Orbán calls this the “two-thirds revolution.”

Orbán’s party claimed it needed to replace the old constitution, which was a remnant of Hungary’s Communist past. Few doubted the need to address the reform of corrupt, ineffective institutions. But many critics saw the establishment of new, gerrymandered election districts as taking things a step too far. Allowing powerful councils headed by Orbán’s loyal followers to oversee the media, the judiciary, and the budget further strained Hungary’s civil liberties.

In the two years since taking power, Orbán’s government quickly passed nearly 400 laws that would grant him broad new powers, including submitting Hungary’s central bank to his own political goals and affecting the independence of the Data Protection Agency. The Venice Commission, which advises the Council of Europe on constitutional issues, has recently claimed that the degree of centralization in Hungary’s judicial system is unprecedented. The Commission found the establishment of the National Judicial Authority to be the most worrisome of the new developments. The new body is headed by the wife of a prominent Fidesz politician who has the power to select judges personally. Her nine-year mandate—the length of the position is not unprecedented among Orbán’s newly established councils—grants Fidesz power over the institution, even if the party loses the next, or the subsequent, national election.

Orbán’s economic management has been equally detrimental to Hungary’s hopes to remain a prosperous democracy. The crisis tax his cabinet imposed on foreign-owned companies and the nationalization of mandatory private pension funds have stunned international markets. The three major rating agencies, Fitch, Standards & Poor’s, and Moody’s, have already assigned the country “junk” status. The exchange rates of the forint—Hungary’s national currency—Hungary’s public debt, and borrowing costs in the bond market are worse than at any other time in the last two decades. Hungary wants a $26.5 billion standby loan, but the IMF and the EU donors have been hesitant to begin negotiations with the government, since one of Orbán’s first actions in office was to send their delegations back home.

As Hungary’s financial situation continued to deteriorate, Orbán’s administration implored Hungarians not to leave the country for leisure or study. According to the government, Hungarians spend 400 billion forints annually (approximately $1.6 billion) on holidays abroad. “This amount, if spent at home, could increase the prestige of domestic tourism, the standard of services, and could create jobs,” a government-produced promotional video announced. The ad was one of many that sought to reinforce Hungarians’ bond with their own country and used the excuse of money leaving the country through travel to explain Hungary’s economic malaise.

In addition, the government demanded that students who receive scholarships sign contracts that prohibit them from working outside Hungary for a specified number of years. Students who receive sponsorship for their bachelor’s and master’s degrees would be required to work in Hungary for more than 10 years.
How has Hungary, once a model for democratic transition, regressed so rapidly? Was Hungary not ready for democratization? Hungarian Nobel laureate Imre Kertész was quoted in The Guardian as saying, “Hungary is a country which has never known democracy—and by that I mean not a democratic political system, but an organic process which has mobilised the entire country’s society.”

Gordon Bajnai, who was appointed Hungary’s prime minister with a one-year mandate in 2009–2010 to manage the crisis before the next elections, was not so pessimistic. Bajnai, now an adjunct professor of international and public affairs at SIPA, explained that Hungary’s first democratic decade was characterized by unprecedented growth and progress, but that wealth was distributed in an extremely unequal and unfair way. By 2002, campaigns based on “shortsighted political bidding to win the support of those with interests in redistribution gradually led the budget onto an unsustainable course.”

Now it is Hungary’s EU membership that might be on an unsustainable course. In early 2012, Hungary’s extreme right wing party Jobbik made leaving the EU part of its platform. While virtually unknown prior to former prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány’s gaffe, Jobbik’s fortunes have risen in tandem with Orbán, receiving 17 percent of the vote in Hungary’s latest national election. Both Jobbik and Orbán often compare the EU’s interference in Hungarian affairs to that of the Soviet Union. Yet it is perhaps only through the EU model of “mutual interference” that Hungary might avoid a full slide into authoritarianism.

In response to a missed deficit target, EU finance ministers suspended €495 million ($650 million) in cohesion funds to Hungary, a move that many viewed as political since other EU members who had failed to meet targets were spared punishment. Orbán has since promised Brussels to revise some of his administration’s laws. At home, however, Orbán appears more determined than ever to continue on his previous path. At a March 15 rally, Orbán declared to a cheering crowd of 200,000 that Hungarians will not be “second-class citizens” in Europe, and he will not let his country be turned into a “colony.”

What the future holds for Hungary remains uncertain. Despite the current administration’s authoritarian inclinations and failed economic policies, Orbán’s Fidesz remains the most popular party in Hungary. “The main question is whether he [Orbán] acts rationally,” says Hungarian journalist Pál Dániel Rényi. A recent recipient of a press freedom award from Reporters Without Borders, Rényi believes it is hard to assess what options Orbán has right now.

Some Hungarian commentators cite the resignation of President Pál Schmitt in early April over a plagiarized doctoral dissertation from the early 1990s as evidence that Hungary is not a country where politicians can do whatever they want without consequences. But Orbán is no ordinary politician. He has been in Hungarian politics for too long. Many fear he is willing to eliminate Hungary’s democratic institutions to stay in power even longer—and prove to the rest of the world that democratization is not irreversible.

Krisztian Simon is a first-year MIA student.
Robert C. Lieberman, vice dean and professor of political science and public affairs, has been appointed as interim dean at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA).

Lieberman succeeds Dean John H. Coatsworth, who was appointed by President Lee C. Bollinger as Provost of Columbia University on February 17, 2012. The announcement marked the close of a tremendously successful tenure for Coatsworth at SIPA—an era of remarkable progress and growth in the School’s mission to equip new leaders to serve the global public interest.

Coatsworth, a leading scholar of Latin American economic and international history, served as dean from 2007 to 2012. His signature achievements included obtaining academic and financial autonomy for SIPA in 2009. While maintaining close ties with the Arts and Sciences, SIPA became an independent graduate school at Columbia, able to develop its own priorities in recruiting faculty, setting enrollment targets, and developing new and unique programs.

Concurrent with the School’s independence was the launch of a more focused curriculum to prepare students better for the professional policy challenges they will face. The new curriculum streamlined concentrations, added managerial courses, and placed greater emphasis on Capstone workshops. Coatsworth also propelled a dramatic rise in the student fellowship budget, fueled by record alumni giving.

Coatsworth instituted SIPA’s 2010–2015 Strategic Plan, which outlined his goal to make students a top priority. His vision was to raise SIPA’s standing within the top tier of public policy schools as measured by the School’s ability to recruit and retain top faculty, attract outstanding students from around the world, and contribute to public debate on global issues.

Lieberman will serve as interim dean while an advisory group assists President Bollinger in the search for a permanent SIPA dean.

“I agree when President Bollinger says an interim year is not a year for standing still,” said Lieberman. “We will build on the foundation of excellence laid by Dean Coatsworth—and his predecessors—and continue the work of retaining and recruiting the best faculty, educating the best students, and doing it in a way that helps solve the world’s problems.”


A focal point of Lieberman’s work has been the reimagining of global public policy education—crafting a new category of intellectual endeavor and new styles of policy instruction for the 21st century. In 2011, Lieberman convened a conference on the future of global public policy education to consider its core mission as a field, focusing on intellectual foundations, curriculum, and research.

“The next five years at SIPA are going to be very exciting. You will find new faculty, even more qualified students, more interesting and relevant courses, more research centers—and global problems we can’t foresee now but will be prepared for when they hit, “said Lieberman.”


His many awards include the American Political Science Association’s Leonard D. White Award, the Social Science History Association’s President’s Book Award, Harvard University Press’s Thomas J. Wilson Prize, Columbia University’s Lionel Trilling Award, and a fellowship from the American Philosophical Society.

Scott Barrett, Lenfest-Earth Institute Professor of Natural Resource Economics, will serve as SIPA’s vice dean of academic affairs. The vice dean leads faculty recruitment and development at SIPA. Barrett served as vice dean during 2010–2011, while Lieberman conducted research supported by a fellowship from the American Philosophical Society.

“I am looking forward to working with Dean Lieberman to ensure that SIPA retains, recruits, and provides a stimulating research environment for the world’s best faculty in international and public affairs,” said Barrett.
At the 12th annual Global Leadership Awards Dinner on April 26, 2012, Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs honored three guardians of the public interest: Lisa Anderson, president of the American University in Cairo, dean of SIPA from 1997 to 2007, and an eminent scholar on politics in the Middle East and North Africa; Howard Graham Buffett, president of the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, a private philanthropic foundation that funds initiatives aimed at improving the standard of living and quality of life for the world’s most impoverished and marginalized populations; and Peter G. “Pete” Peterson, chairman emeritus and co-founder of The Blackstone Group, a private investment banking firm, and founder and chairman of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, whose mission is to target “undeniable, unsustainable, and untouchable” threats to the nation’s future and to future generations of Americans.

Interim Dean Robert C. Lieberman welcomed guests to the annual awards at the Mandarin Oriental, noting that the Global Leadership Awards honor individuals who, through work in public policy and administration, have made innovative or otherwise extraordinary contributions to the global public good. Proceeds raised from the dinner directly support financial aid for SIPA’s outstanding students. Lieberman introduced two members of the class of 2012, Keondra Bills and Tarik Chalali, whose remarks described the individual paths that led them to SIPA and the community they found there.

The evening concluded with a tribute by Columbia President Lee C. Bolinger to John Coatsworth, University Provost, in recognition of his years as dean of SIPA.
An Interview with Katie Stanton  By Sara Ray

Katie Stanton (MIA ’95) is currently Twitter’s head of international strategy. This spring, she took time out from her busy schedule and answered our questions about Twitter, her time at SIPA, and social media in government. Prior to joining Twitter, she was special adviser to the Office of Innovation at the State Department.

Given your role in the White House as the director of citizen participation, what are your thoughts on Twitter and its impact on the U.S. elections?

Twitter has become an essential platform for candidates to reach their voters and for gathering and responding to feedback in real time. It has also been an important tool for voters to stay in touch and learn about the issues that they most care about.

Many world leaders use Twitter, and it was a crucial part of the Arab Spring. How has Twitter changed the practice and face of public diplomacy?

There are currently 38 heads of state on Twitter (or their institutional account such as @whitehouse), and the list is growing. World leaders are on Twitter to connect directly with their citizens as well as the global community. When Mona Eltahawy, an Egyptian journalist, was beaten and arrested in Tahrir Square, she tweeted about it. The U.S. Embassy in Cairo tweeted about her arrest within hours and told the world community it was concerned and was investigating. It even used the #FreeMona hashtag.

Was there a particular class or experience at SIPA that has been informative in your career?

The best part of my SIPA experience was meeting so many incredible people from around the world. They remain my best friends.

In terms of the international scene, do you see ways in which Twitter is underutilized? Just as it became a surprisingly effective organizing tool during the Arab Spring, do you anticipate other still underutilized ways that the international community will use Twitter in the future?

Twitter is currently available in 28 languages, and we have short codes set up all over the world to make it easier for our users to connect, discover, and share what’s happening in the world. More than 57 percent of our usage is on a mobile device. I expect to see mobile penetration increase significantly in the future.

What advice do you have for SIPA students about how to make the most of their time in school?

Get as many practical skills as possible. Master as many foreign languages as you can. Become a Keynote pro. Get on Twitter.

While working in the State Department’s Office of Innovation, what did you feel was the biggest hurdle in terms of implementing strategic use of modern technology? What hang-ups or problems does the government face when deciding how to use social media?

The biggest challenge for government, generally, is that there is a strong aversion to risk. This is probably a good thing. Social media several years ago was new and, therefore, risky. The State Department has led the way, in my opinion, on how to use social media in a positive way. As Secretary Clinton says, we need to use the tools of the 21st century to help address the challenges of the 21st century.

Sara Ray is an administrative assistant in SIPA’s Office of Communications and External Relations.
PhD Students at the Intersection of Science and International Policy Debates  By Michelle Chahine

Three PhD in Sustainability Development candidates at SIPA, expected to graduate in May 2012, used scientific research and economic modeling to inform global policy debates and decisions.

JESSE ANTTILA-HUGHES has been in the PhD in Sustainability Development program since the fall of 2006, focusing on environmental risk, disasters and demography, climate impact on public health, and behavioral responses to environmental risk.

His recent publication, Destruction, Disinvestment, and Death: Economic and Human Losses Following Environmental Disaster, with Solomon M. Hsiang (PhD ’11), finds that losses one year after a natural disaster are much greater than those estimated during the same year, particularly when it comes to decreases in income and increases in female infant mortality rates.

By looking at data from the Philippines after typhoons, they found the increase in infant mortality is mostly attributed to the death of female infants. This is driven by economic factors, according to Anttila-Hughes. In addition, he explained that households with multiple children, particularly older sons, have higher rates of female infants dying.

“The fact that a lot of environmental impacts affect females is very interesting to me. There is a lot that can be done to intervene to change that,” said Anttila-Hughes. “The paper has pretty direct policy implications—which is generally what I aim for. I think it’s very difficult to do environmental risk work without its being policy related. It directly informs disaster response policy,” he added.

A central topic of his thesis has been an infrastructure development project that looks at expanding electricity networks in Africa on a continental scale by conducting economic modeling. “How do you do that in the best way, in the cheapest way?” he asked. “Because resources are there, what is the best way to move them?”

“Institutionally, it’s a horror,” he explained. For example, there are security issues. The Congo has a lot of resources and little need, while South Africa has little resources and high need. However, there are risks in having your resources depend on a country that’s at war. Sanoh proposes different scenarios to minimize risks. “You have to package it in a way that’s appealing to both sides,” he said.

“I’m proposing to reduce regional barriers. It’s always good to do integration, but you have to show benefits and costs. So I’m happy to show what’s gained from it is greater than what’s lost. I’m going to prove numerically that what I’m proposing as a plan is a better option economically and socially.”

GEOFFREY JOHNSTON’S research focus during his time at SIPA has been malaria, especially malaria drug resistance. “There is only one drug now, and people are worried the parasite will become resistant,” explained Johnston.

The World Bank and the Global Fund give subsidies to provide drugs at a low cost. But that creates a dilemma, which lies at the heart of Johnston’s research.

“If you provide drugs cheaply, resistance will spread. If you don’t, people can’t afford it, and people will die,” he said. “Public policy issues are the balance: how much should the subsidies be? What is the right level? In a best possible scenario, in an ideal world, we would have science to help inform global policy questions—instead of just throwing darts on the board.”

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Johnston hopes his research, along with that of his peers in the PhD program, will make a difference and inform policymakers. There are a lot of questions that need to be answered before the right policies are created, according to Johnston. That’s where he hopes the science behind global development issues will come in to play.

“That’s essentially what the program tries to do,” he said. “Take an analytical approach to policy issues and get the best scientific background and research on the topic, bringing a scientific skill set to a problem of global import.”
SIPA Students Work with Clients across the Globe  By Michelle Chahine

The Capstone workshop is a defining feature of the SIPA curriculum. Teams of students work with a faculty adviser for one semester, effectively becoming researchers and consultants for a client. This past spring, SIPA students worked on diverse projects around the world.

A TEAM OF FIVE STUDENTS, working with the Samata Foundation in Nepal, assessed health care access for the marginalized Dalit population, traditionally known as “untouchables” and discriminated against based on the caste system. Various NGOs estimate the Dalits are anywhere between 13 to 21 percent of Nepal’s population.

“Basically, when we first started this, we were told that there’s no literature or understanding around health care access for this population, particular to Nepal,” explained Kiryn Lanning (MIA/MPH ’12). “There’s a lot of literature on it in India, and there’s been a lot of work around it. But in Nepal, there hasn’t been much.”

Vivek Yadav (MPA ‘12) and Mai Shintani (MIA ‘12), conducted field research in early January. They visited a Dalit compound and met with NGOs, UNICEF, WHO, and government officials in Nepal.

The rest of the team, Tsufit Daniel (MPA/MPH ‘12), Nadia Hasham (MIA ‘12), and Lanning, traveled there in March with the primary focus of capturing the voice of the Dalit community.

“There are so many different social constraints and circumstances and historical discrimination that are compounded within this one particular population,” Lanning added.

Lanning said that Nepal is currently designing its constitution, so this is an important time to bring these issues to light.

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TWO STUDENTS had the extraordinary opportunity to sit down with a high-ranking leader from the Republic of Georgia, deputy chairwoman of Parliament Rusudan Kervalishvili.

The students were part of a team of six who collaborated with the Women’s Political Resource Center in Georgia to examine the level of political participation of internally displaced persons.

“We’re particularly focused on women,” says Marissa Polnerow (MIA ’12), “analyzing how they can promote their voices in Georgia and promote more inclusive governance.”

As part of their Workshop in Development Practice, Polnerow and Alexandra dos Reis Stefanopoulos (MIA ’12) traveled to Georgia in late January to conduct interviews with academics, NGO leaders, and government officials. They also conducted two focus groups with two different sets of women, one from the first wave of IDPs from Al-Khazia in the early 1990s, another from the second wave of IDPs from the 2008 war.

During their interviews, Polnerow and dos Reis Stefanopoulos spoke with Rusudan Kervalishvili about the political participation of women in general and internally displaced women specifically.

“We wanted to speak to her as a woman leader in Georgia, and she was very open,” said dos Reis Stefanopoulos.

“Rusudan Kervalishvili is the most powerful woman in Parliament,” added Polnerow. “But there are six other women in Parliament, which is a very small representation of women’s views.”

Their four teammates traveled to Georgia in March to meet with more stakeholders, including members of the IDP community, and gather additional research for their final report.

“Georgia is facing elections in the upcoming year,” said Polnerow. “So this is an important time to be talking about these issues and promoting more inclusive governance.”

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A TEAM OF FOUR STUDENTS traveled to Tanzania in early January to design a pilot program for First Access, a start-up that was recently co-founded by team member Nicole Stubbs (MPA ’12), CEO of the new for-profit social enterprise.

“What we are doing is trying to reduce costs for borrowing and lending capital in informal markets where people traditionally have no formal financial records that can reliably show what they own or what they earn,” explained Stubbs.

During their time in Tanzania, the team met with the management of microfinance institutions to collect information about their operations and determine the pricing models that would work best for them. The team has now designed the pilot, which will roll out in June.

“We have a lot of different organizations on board to help test this model once we’re ready,” said Stubbs. “The main focus of this project was practical tools for the company. It wasn’t so much researching something and producing recommendations, as actually creating something out of nothing.”

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EIGHT SIPA STUDENTS worked on a Capstone workshop that focused on Uganda’s “Oil Bills,” conducting research and making recommendations on ways to effectively legislate and manage newly found oil reserves.

Media outlets in Uganda, including The Daily Monitor and The Independent, quoted the team’s comments on two petroleum bills currently being considered by the Ugandan Parliament. Marie-Paule Jeansonne (MIA ‘12) and Sri Swaminathan (MPA ’12) led the effort under the guidance of Professor Jenik Radon.

The students and Professor Radon also presented their comments and recommendations in person to 15 members of the Ugandan Parliament’s Natural Resource Committee in March.

During their time in Uganda in mid-March, the team organized meetings, both in the capital city Kampala and the resource-rich Hoima region that borders the Democratic Republic of Congo, with individuals from government ministries, members of Parliament (governing and opposition), civil society, Ugandan citizens, international donors, foreign embassies, and international and local media.

“We tried to identify what they see as the biggest issues and problems,” said Jeansonne. “By then, we already had ideas about what our recommendations would be, so our field trip was a good chance to test them. We had to make sure our report was something that could be actionable.”
Class Notes

1950
Paul Huygelen, M.A. International Relations
Paul Huygelen’s Equator Crossings (ISBN: 9781860632501), published in Dubai by Motivate Publishing, and acclaimed by the director of the Royal Geographical Society, London, covers the period 1871–1889 of Henry Morton Stanley’s four expeditions into Central Africa, each one starting from Zanzibar. The book’s initial chapters highlight Stanley’s search for and meeting with Dr. David Livingstone at Ujiji. Yet its up-to-date value resides in reliving Stanley’s circumnavigation of the Great Nyanza (Lake Victoria, one lake, not three masses of water) as part of his 999-day trek, which proved that the Lu- alba River is the source of the Congo River, not of the Nile, as imagined by Dr. Livingstone. Within a few years, these two hydrological discoveries turned Central Africa into contentious political real estate for Europe’s principal powers, the latter egged on by colonialists such as Pierre de Brazza or lebensraum strategists like Dr. Karl Peters, Pierre de Brazza or lebensraum strategists like Dr. Karl Peters, until Otto von Bismarck at the Berlin Conference (November 1884–February 1885) made Stanley’s Congo Basin map that of King Leopold II’s Congo Free State, the contours of which are perpetuated in today’s Democratic Republic of the Congo.

1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and...