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Readers:

With the newest edition of the Northeastern University Political Review comes a new crop of issues for our writers and readers to write and debate about. In my third year with this organization, I have watched it grow into a publication that produces high quality academic pieces on issues ranging from the Environmental Protection Agency to race identities in Northern Ireland.

Perhaps the most ever-present and hotly contested topic these past few months is the Occupy movement. Since its inception, we have featured pieces on the movement both on our website and in our print publication. By far, these articles have generated the most debate in our comment section, from you, our readers.

This generation has been accused of being lazy, selfish, and unengaged, choosing to record the trivial parts of our lives on the Internet rather than participate in meaningful political discussion or action. But what the Occupy movement has done, whether you believe in its ideals or not, has demonstrated that this generation, or at least a lot of its members, are not as lazy, selfish, and unengaged as the public was led to believe.

Young people dissatisfied with the government's support of big business are taking to Dewey Square, while Northeastern's own students, unhappy with the university, took to Krentzman Quad for a few nights. Those who do not agree with the Occupy movement have made their voices heard, in our publication and others, sparking a debate amongst the youth about what our future should look like and who is at fault for the current state of affairs.

While we may not see what the Occupy movement will bring about for some time, we have seen it inspire a discourse that is sure to have a lasting impact. We continue to strive to be a forum for that discourse. So please, make yourselves heard.

Kaileigh Higgins
Journalism '13
Editor-in-Chief
Northeastern University Political Review

Debt Ceiling Panic: Unnecessary Instability or Crucial Wake-Up Call?

During last summer, the economy was teetering on the edge of collapse due in part to the question of whether or not the debt ceiling, a ninety-year-old government policy, would be raised before the United States hit its limit. The main theory propping up the continued use of the debt ceiling has been the belief that it prevents unrestricted spending by the government. St John's University Professor Anita S. Krishnakumar argues in her *Harvard Journal on Legislation* article, "In Defense of the Debt Limit Statute" that "The debt limit statute encourages legislators to consider the interests of the general public and future generations, rather than those of special interests, and thus acts as an important institutional check on

party and interest group politics." While in theory, the debt ceiling provides an institutional check on governmental spending, in practice, the policy's utility as a check on spending is debatable.

To understand the issue at hand, it is important to know the history behind the statutory limit on debt. The debt ceiling was created as part of the Second Liberty Bond Act of 1917, which at the time was used to finance the United States' entrance into World War I. Prior to the enactment of this law, the United States Congress had general authority to approve any Treasury transaction which would result in additional government borrowing. With this authority, the Congress also made a determination about how many bonds could be issued by the treasury, as well as their

maturity date and the amount of paid interest.

Such a policy sounds acceptable to most outside observers; however, having each economic transaction by the Treasury subject to the review of Congress puts necessary measures for financing the government at the hands of an extremely slow working, deliberative body. Thus, the Second Liberty Bond Act was meant to alleviate this inertia in the process by setting predetermined separate limits on categories of debt such as bonds and certificates. By 1939, the Congress eliminated the separate limits and implemented an aggregate limit that covered all public debt created by the treasury.

Exact figures give a numerical sense of how much the debt limit has evolved: the original limit was set at \$11.5 billion, which would be more than \$263 billion today. Because of the most recent extension, the ceiling currently stands at \$15.194 trillion (equivalent to about \$857 billion dollars in 1917). Much of the early-expanded growth in debt occurred because of the costs incurred by World War II. In 1939, our debt ceiling stood at \$45 billion, but by 1945, that number had increased six-fold to nearly \$300 billion. Since then, Congress has enacted at least 80 separate alterations to the federal debt limit, the vast majority of which were increases due to continuous years of budget deficits.



The Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., site of the debt ceiling controversy.

Photo Courtesy of jcolman via Flickr.

There are several issues with the validity of the debt ceiling as a structural check. One major question about the validity of the debt ceiling's use as the check against growth in the national debt arises from this review of the law's history. It is questionable whether this legislation was originally meant to be used as a way to protect against government borrowing at all. From the reexamination of how the policy came into existence, it seems as though the debt ceiling was originally intended to provide the National Treasury with additional borrowing autonomy as it no longer had to have Congress approve every transaction. By instituting a borrowing limit, the Congress allowed the Treasury Department the authority to borrow continuously until hitting the limit, in order to pay for the cost of World War I.

Further, the history of the legislation notwithstanding, there is another issue with the idea that the debt ceiling can stop the growth of debt. The debt ceiling as a protection against the amassment of debt is an almost paradoxical argument when considering that the debt ceiling can be raised by an act of Congress. While a static debt ceiling would prevent the increased growth of debt, the US system has a dynamic limit. There is a good reason for the ability to raise the debt limit: it prevents the United States from defaulting on its debt payments. However, because raising the debt ceiling is such a necessity, its role as a barrier to debt growth is diminished almost entirely. Still,

even beyond those two issues, might there still be some credence to the debt ceiling's utility as a force on Congress to consider the long-term implications of the debt?

Krishnakumar's main argument for keeping the debt ceiling is based on the ceiling providing a reason for Congress

"It seems as though the debt ceiling was originally intended to provide the National Treasury with additional borrowing autonomy as it no longer had to have Congress approve every transaction."

to consider the size of the debt every time they must move to raise the limit. This theory of the debt ceiling's utility was tested during the summer of 2011, when raising the debt ceiling became the focus of Washington. However, the prolonged debate about the debt ceiling did not provide a benefit for the nation, and arguably made a terrible situation even worse.

The 2011 debt debate occurred as the threat of default loomed overhead. This threat of default was caused largely by discussions occurring within weeks of the actual deadline, as opposed to the ideal situation of a few months prior to the deadline. Due to the degree of uncertainty

in whether or not the debt ceiling would be increased on time, rating agencies began to consider the United States as being at risk for default.

While the discussion Krishnakumar envisioned may have occurred to a degree, the heated and rushed nature of the discussion contributed to a negative result on economic instability. The utility of the debt ceiling as a facilitator of debate is questionable when the ensuing debate creates high levels of uncertainty among US Treasury Bond holders. This uncertainty led Moody's Analytics, a credit rating firm, to proclaim that the United States should eliminate the debt ceiling.

According to Moody's, one of the main flaws in the US system is that the United States is the only nation in the world, other than Denmark, to have a firm limit on debt. Since the United States had historically raised the debt ceiling with ease, the limit had not been considered as creating risk for the United States to default on its debt obligations. The creation of uncertainty surrounding the fear that the ceiling would not be raised on time was the dominant reason for credit rating firm Standard & Poor's (S&P) to lower the credit rating of the United States from an AAA rating down to an AA+. One notable statement on the issue by S&P was the claim that, "the effectiveness, stability, and predictability of American policymaking and political institutions have weakened at a time of ongoing fiscal and

economic challenges to a degree more than we envisioned when we assigned a negative outlook to the rating.” The instability of having a statutory limit on debt was perceivable through the debt limit debate and the negative reaction of S&P.

In 2011, the United States nearly defaulted on its debt due to a statutory limit on borrowing that had been in place since the early twentieth century. While originally designed to allow for more Treasury flexibility, it has

since become a sizable economic burden. Were the debt ceiling to remain US policy, there would need to be massive changes in order to prevent the mass influx of risk that it can create when handled at the last minute. One possible solution would be to replace the current ceiling cap, which may only continue until 2013 at the latest, with a much higher limit to last more than a decade. However, also within the higher limit, a trigger mechanism where in automatic cuts would be

made if the maximum limit were reached. This would not only prevent default, but it may also force a substantive, long-term debate over the fiscal situation of the nation. Whatever is done about the debt limit, it cannot stand at its current capacity unless the nation wants the debates and inherent economic consequences of 2011 become an annual occurrence.

Rob Cohen
Political Science '15

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Pollution, Prevention, Protection: Throwing Your Money Down the Right Drain

Thirty years ago, an unprecedented number of children in Woburn, a community just north of Boston, were diagnosed with leukemia. This unfortunate incident sparked an environmental revolution of sorts, highlighted in the film *A Civil Action*. Although decades have passed in the cleanup through efforts of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the site has yet to yield potable-standard water. The story portrayed in the film does not tell the whole tale. What was true of the Woburn story was the inability of government to address efficiently an environmental and health problem. Have we learned from our mistakes in Woburn since then? The current partisan debates surrounding the EPA suggest no.

Unbeknownst to residents, the Woburn water was contaminated by pollutants spewed

from local factories such as W.R. Grace, a chemicals company, and a local tannery. These chemicals included trichloroethylene (TCE), a synthetic chemical which is known to cause cancer, detrimental reproductive effects, and both kidney and liver damage. At the time, well water was not regularly checked for contaminants; rather, it took nine cases of childhood leukemia and the deaths of two children to spark an investigation. This investigation revealed a compromised water supply, soiled by years of untracked pollution.

Granted, there was no reason for the authorities in Woburn to be concerned with their well water (though residents complained that it tasted funny); however, the lack of foresight in both disease prevention and environmental protection contributed to the rise of government agencies like

the EPA, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other regulatory bodies.

Since its inception, the EPA has implemented a program to clean up the nation’s most hazardous waste sites through a National Priorities List, which includes over 1,000 dangerous sites to human health that are first in line to be cleaned up. One of these sites is Woburn. Dangerous, toxic chemicals that are detrimental to human health contaminate these sites, so the Superfund, as it is commonly referred to, provides federal dollars for the cleanup of these extremely high-risk zones. The EPA further attempts to reclaim these expenditures by pursuing those individuals or companies that are responsible for the initial pollution.

However, this process often takes decades, as it is often difficult

to prove scientifically that there is a single source polluter for a site. In addition to this, there may not be any money left in the company to pursue legal recourse once a polluter is identified. Because of the myriad challenges facing cleanup, it is obvious that to avoid the numerous problems that arise when attempting to retroactively protect human health and hold polluters accountable for their actions, the best defense is just that: defense. Prevention is the primary method to avoid costly cleanups of toxic materials, and could have saved the lives of the two children in Woburn.

More recently, the EPA has been in the spotlight for attempting to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, smog-forming pollutants, and toxic chemicals in the air, arguably at the expense of business. In the race for the presidency given the economic downturn, several presidential hopefuls have pledged to eliminate the EPA altogether. Congress has also weakened the Clean Air Act, which prevents pollutants such as sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxides from entering our atmosphere, last year.

The simple reason for this rash of deregulation is jobs. Opponents to the Clean Air Act and the work of the EPA in general, argue that regulation destroys jobs. Fox Business News argues, “Opponents of proposed EPA rules on everything from automobile emissions to coal mines say that regulations would force companies to lay off workers or limit hiring more of them.” In



A Superfund site located near the Appalachian Trail.

Photo Courtesy of cheflavesbeer via Flickr.

an uneasy economic atmosphere where job creation will be crucial to the presidential race, these arguments will hold much weight.

Both major parties cite statistics on either job creation or destruction in conjunction with this now-controversial agency. However, the hidden reasoning for deregulation of the environment is industry. The Clean Air Act imposes requirements on industry for the installation of smokestack scrubbers, which catch pollutants before they exit the factory, and other costly measures. Arguably, this will add to production costs in domestic industry, thus making our producers less competitive than their unregulated counterparts in the developing world.

The EPA released a report outlining their cost-benefit analysis of the Clean Air Act amendments of 1990, projecting benefits and costs of the programs implemented by this law out to the year 2020. Compared to a

hypothetical baseline assuming control programs of the 1970 and 1977 Clean Air Act amendments, the benefits of the 1990 amendments to the law would provide an estimated annual cost to society of \$65 million. The benefits from improved air quality like avoidance of premature death and illness improved economic welfare to Americans, and better environmental conditions are estimated to be \$2 trillion per year by 2020. By this estimate, the benefits of reducing pollution through regulation dramatically outweigh the costs of implementation.

So the question remains, what is the role of EPA regulation today? For Woburn, the EPA entered too late and assisted in the cleanup of pollutants harmful to human health and safety. The Clean Air Act was passed to prevent this same mistake from occurring twice. If Americans believe that market economics will produce

desirable results for collective national health as a facet of our production system, then the EPA is unnecessary. But if the United States recognizes that government exists to provide for our health and well-being, and that industry, by nature, will cut costs to a bare minimum as part of their fiduciary responsibility to maximize profit, then we might do well to learn from our own past mistakes.

Our failure in Woburn, and in most other EPA Superfund sites, was not placing a price tag on our common resources. Regulation was nonexistent, and there was no mechanism in place to prevent companies from negligently dumping toxic chemicals with no pre-treatment, allowing those chemicals to pollute a public resource and damage public health. Now that there is a regulatory

agency in place to impose restrictions that can prevent the creation of toxic, harmful sites like those on the Superfund list, we have the capability to prevent further disasters and learn from our past mistakes.

Catia Sharp
International Affairs &
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Symptoms of Cold Warfare Between Saudi Arabia and Iran

Part 1 of 3

This is the first in a three-part series that will examine the historical foundations, current dynamics, and future prospects of the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia in light of the recent allegations that the Iranian government attempted to assassinate a Saudi diplomat in the United States.

This October the attention of the world became focused on one of the most volatile yet least talked about relationships in international affairs, that between Iran and Saudi Arabia. On October 11, Attorney General Eric Holder and FBI Director Robert Mueller announced federal charges “against two people who allegedly attempted to carry out a deadly plot directed by factions of the Iranian government to assassinate a foreign ambassador here in the United States.” News

of the alleged plot, hatched by Iranian-born Manssor Arbabsiar and directed at Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States, has inflamed once dormant tensions between the two states.

Had the US government failed to prevent the planned attack from taking place, it is almost certain the international community would have seen just how quickly Iran and Saudi Arabia could turn an ideological cold war into full-scale military conflict. The two countries’ geographic proximity to one another and complete devotion to political Islam are just two of the many factors that have instead torn these states apart. These two large and influential states are locked in a historic disagreement over their respective regional roles, and have diverged further over how best to engage the West, especially given both countries’ vast oil reserves.

As a result, relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have fluctuated from moderated tension to critically high-conflict situations. Examining the foundations of this seemingly intractable conflict offers a unique historical paradigm that can be used to better inform policy makers and academics as to the causes of existing tensions, thus providing them with the necessary foundational knowledge required to bring about a long-term, diplomatic solution.

Tracing back the sources of contemporary hostilities between Saudi Arabia and Iran, two factors stand out above the rest as fueling and exacerbating this divide; first, the sectarian split between Shiite and Sunni Muslims and second, the century-old geopolitical struggle for influence in the Persian Gulf region. Longstanding disagreements between Iran and Saudi Arabia have now branched off to form the primary differences

that polarize and divide not only the two countries, but their regional neighbors as well.

At its most fundamental level, what separates Iran and Saudi Arabia is a deeply-rooted religious dispute over the rightful successor of the prophet Mohammed, and therefore over leadership in the Islamic world. Adherents of Shia Islam believe that leadership was to be kept a hereditary procedure which contrasts with the Sunni belief that local community elites should elect future leaders. Although historic disputes and wars between the two sects have occurred for centuries, the 1801 destruction of Karbala, the second holiest city in Sh’ia Islam, by Muhammad Ibn Saud, the head of the first Saudi State, is traceable as one of the first examples of Shiite-Sunni armed conflict in modern history. The Persian impulse for regional hegemony, originating from its historic years of empire, has led many conservative Arabs to be skeptical of their Shia neighbors.

Saudis especially believe that Iran continues to seek regional control while subordinating those states that surround it. Today, Saudi Arabia sees these imperial ambitions manifested in Iran’s increasing internal radicalism, deteriorating relations with the West, and development of nuclear capacities. Furthermore, Iran’s sphere of influence is not limited insofar as its borders permit and extends to Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Bashar al-Assad in Syria with the country seeking to impose a “crescent” of



Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates (right) and King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud walk to the meeting room at the king’s hunting lodge in Saudi Arabia on Jan. 17, 2007. Gates is in Saudi Arabia to meet with the king to discuss current issues in the Middle East.

Photo Courtesy of Cherie A. Thurlby via Department of Defense.

influence on the region. Senior clerics in Iran have virulently criticized the Saudi royal family as well, judging Saudi possession of two crucial Islamic cities, Mecca and Medina, as corrupt, and their monarchical authority as illegitimate.

Issues that have produced distasteful bilateral relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia throughout history have markedly impacted the course of the twentieth century. As a result of these relations, political discourse and development in the Persian Gulf region has changed dramatically and these changes have impacted the countries’ interactions with the international community. The global transformation from colonial monarchies toward more numerous and widespread democracies faced resistance in both Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Over time, this resulted in the traditional hereditary monarchy of Saudi Arabia and the anti-western Islamic Republic of Iran. Caused largely by both powerhouses avoiding substantial colonial rule, state development occurred very differently in comparison to other emerging post-colonial states. During the 1920s, both nations were making momentous progress in nation-building, and their constructive coexistence resulted in a 1929 treaty that formally symbolized their friendship.

It was not until late in the 1940s following the creation of Israel that Iran and Saudi Arabia first drifted apart. This was spurred by Muhammad Reza Shah, the Iranian king and son of the British imposed Reza Shah upon granting de facto recognition to Israel and establishing close military ties with the new state.

Saudi Arabia gawked in disbelief. During the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, Saudi Arabia joined with Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen to fight and crush the newly independent Israel. As a result of the disputes over recognition of Israel, the Saudis would not open themselves up to diplomatic discussions with Iran until 1966 when King Faisal al-Saud and Muhammad Reza Shah visited one another officially to handle disputes concerning controversial island possession in the Gulf.

Though largely symbolic, these meetings demonstrated a newly adopted responsibility to peace and security by the two regional powers. The years between 1968, when the British officially left the region, and 1979,

the year of the Iranian Revolution, stand as the best period of relations between the two countries. At the time, both stood against communism in the Cold War fight against anti-authoritarian religious radicals. However, the Iranian Revolution changed this alignment as it resulted in the overthrow of the Shah and his regime and resulted in the establishment of a constitutional theocracy in Iran. When Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini emerged as the Supreme Leader of Iran, immediate criticism was voiced by a fearful Saudi Arabia concerned over its imposing neighbor's military dominance and modernization. The Shah's massive investment in Iranian military capabilities transformed its army from sub-

par to regional superpower status, therefore providing Saudi Arabia with ample justification for its fears.

Manssor Arbabsiar's attempt to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States adds just another chapter in the long book of antagonistic history between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Whether the two cultures clash over ethnic tensions, the sectarian split between Shiites and Sunnis, or geographical territorialism, history shows that very rarely will a resolved situation arise that is a fundamental improvement from past tension.

*Harrison Ackerman
Political Science &
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America in Decline:

Can the United States Continue to Compete?

The West enters the twenty-first century at a crossroads. Having long been the model for economic and political success, the aftereffects of the 2008 Great Recession have resulted in a world in which developing countries with emerging markets now have greater economic dynamism than years past, while old economic powerhouses are struggling to secure their foundations. Atop this hierarchy sits the United States, though its base has steadily eroded. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects that the United States economy will grow by 1.5 percent, while Europe's will

collectively grow by 1.6 percent. This stands in stark contrast to developing countries which are projected to grow at a rate of 6.5 percent in 2011.

This raises the question of whether weak economic growth against the backdrop of political divisions within the United States and its main political and security ally, the European Union (EU), will lead to an inevitable decline in US power. Despite difficult choices that need to be made in the short run, the United States still retains the economic, military, and institutional resources necessary to allow its leaders the freedom of

action to address these issues in the long run and secure its preeminent position.

The prospect of decline presents the United States with a vexing dilemma; either it can continue with current spending levels, thus maintaining its military and technological primacy or, conversely, it can attempt to stimulate economic growth by contracting inwards and increasing investment in its production capacity. Economic theory speaks of the fundamental choice every society faces between "guns" and "butter"—given a limited amount of resources, a decision to increase

military spending will result in a decrease in the total possible supply of consumer goods available to a society. In 2010, the combined defense budget of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members was greater than \$1 trillion, of which United States expenditures accounted for roughly 50 percent. Meanwhile, collective military expenditures of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), the primary potential balancers to US power, amounted to \$230 billion. Given this economic reality, the burden of American military commitments, including the Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya campaigns, appear unsustainable.

Professor Samuel P. Huntington of Columbia University observes that, "Non-Western civilizations will continue to attempt to acquire the wealth, technology, skills, machines, and weapons that are part of being modern." For the United States, maintaining power first and foremost requires an established economic base and prosperous middle class. American leaders should commit to a reappraisal of the "grand strategy": shift away from defense expenditures and focus on domestic priorities, or else face gradual decline.

Decline can be characterized as being relative. Professor Paul Kennedy of Yale University observes that "it simply has not been given to any one society to remain permanently ahead of all the others, because that would imply a freezing of the differentiated pattern of growth

rates, technological advance, and military developments which have existed since time immemorial." A rise in the power resources of competing societies means that the United States will be unable to consistently translate power into desirable outcomes. To maintain its primacy, the United States will increasingly need to pull developing countries into the current international system, a system largely controlled by the United States.

Key areas for mutual cooperation and further progress include global security, international trade, and political development. Militarily, China has attempted to offset US power through increased cooperation with the United Nations (UN) in a number of peacekeeping missions. The International Crisis Group reports that the total number of peacekeepers deployed by China

since it began participating in UN missions now exceeds 10,000. Economically, the United States is attempting to ensure its position as the world's dominant economy by shoring up its alliances and continuing to work with Russia to configure each country's respective trade and investment policies. Doing so will make Russia eligible for accession into the World Trade Organization (WTO) as part of a larger initiative to "reset" US-Russian relations. Diplomatically, the West continues to engage with the Middle East as it undergoes its "Arab Spring".

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton opined, "What is America's role in the Arab Spring? These revolutions are not ours. They are not by us, for us, or against us, but we do have a role. We have the resources, capabilities, and expertise to support those who seek peaceful, meaningful,



U.S. President Barack Obama and Hu Jintao stand in front of the White House during the Chinese premier's 2011 state visit to

Washington D.C.
Official White House Photo by Pete Souza.

democratic reform. And with so much that can go wrong, and so much that can go right, support for emerging Arab democracies is an investment we cannot afford not to make.” In each instance, the US’ continued engagement with other nations speaks to its acknowledged influence and diplomatic clout.

Even in the face of possible decline, the United States possesses a unique capacity for renewal and resurgence. This stems largely from the idea of social capital which political scientist Robert Putnam defines as “networks and the associated norms of reciprocity have value. They have value for the people who are in them, and they have, at least in some instances, demonstrable externalities.” The effective utilization of social capital allows groups to mobilize their resources towards a common vision and purpose. When the Soviet Union launched the Sputnik satellite in 1957, the United States was compelled to achieve a series of new technological advancements to counter-balance against the Soviet success.

In a 1961 joint session before congress, President John F. Kennedy announced, “that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth.” On July 20, 1969, the Apollo 11 spaceflight landed the first humans on the Moon, thus reestablishing American technological superiority. The Soviet Union had made similar investments in its space program,

training as many as 2.7 times the number of engineers put out by the United States, but it was the US’ superior social capital that allowed it to succeed.

Unlike measures for Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), social capital cannot be measured in an exact manner. Rather, the collective goodwill and underlying strength of the economic and political structures that serve to bind societies together ultimately determine their longevity. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) all serve as important institutions for promoting the integration of economic interests among America and her allies in both the developed and developing world. Consequently, the European

“Understanding the politics of decline requires acknowledgement of the fact that the world has become bigger than the sum of its parts.”

Union and the United States now have the largest bilateral trade relationship in the world with US exports to the European Union in 2010 totaling \$239.6 billion and imports totaling \$319.2 billion. The strength of such integral networks is largely based on the willingness of the United States

to provide operational capacity to these institutions and evidenced by the fact that the World Bank and the IMF are primarily funded by the United States and are both headquartered in Washington D.C. The sway the United States has over these global institutions translates into the ability to influence change and address decline in a much more flexible and rapid manner than commonly acknowledged.

Understanding the politics of decline requires acknowledgement of the fact that the world has become bigger than the sum of its parts. Traditionally, the key tenants of American ideology require embracing the values of liberal democracy, market-based capitalism, and the rule of law. In recent years, the so-called “Beijing Consensus” has put forward an alternative model of development that argues for an authoritarian, state-driven approach based on single-party platform that can provide rapid and sustained economic growth. Despite these differing approaches to development, it would be prudent for American leaders to recognize that the rise of the East does not translate into a zero-sum game for the West.

Noted US foreign policy expert Ian Bremmer writes that the continued infusion of foreign direct investment (FDI) from Western countries to the developing world “ensure[s] that state capitalist countries understand that it is also in their interest for the United States to remain economically successful.” Through further FDI,

the West can forestall decline by forming a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship with the rising emerging markets and developing countries.

The pace at which technological innovation, economic development, and knowledge transfer occur in today’s world has expanded at an exponential rate. Consequently, the global issues that the United

States faces have also become increasingly complex. As such, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, US primacy is being challenged by emerging states. Effectively addressing these issues will require the United States to adjust domestic spending priorities, leverage established networks, and engage with the developing world. Critics of unipolarity often cite the common fate

of all empires: prosperity followed by decline. However, Rome was not built in a day and it did not collapse in one either, nor is the ultimate fate of the United States sealed. Its decline is not absolute.

*Ken Lewis
Economics &
Political Science ‘12*

Division in Northern Ireland: Protestants, Catholics and ‘Others’

It can be easy to belittle the progress made by the political and social systems in Northern Ireland (NI) since the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, but let there be no mistake that the headway being made in NI is remarkable. Despite this growth, the society remains segregated. The two principal groups are broadly labeled as Protestant and Catholic, but the defining characteristics of categorizations are elaborate. Historic, economic, and social factors all contribute to the definitions of these categories. Categorization becomes a question of identity, which is an interactive process that is deeply personal. Underneath the obvious divisions is the reality that there are more than two groups in NI. With the percentage of foreign nationals and ethnic groups growing each year, there is a new dynamic of minority identification in NI that is unfolding.

Identity has long been

defined in NI from a top-down perspective. The Sunningdale Agreement focused on two groups and advocated a power-sharing system between them in an effort to provide stability. The Downing Street Declaration maintained this view of the two communities as the basis for all power-sharing. Even the Belfast Agreement relies on these ethno-national identities. There are some who argue that the negotiation of identity in NI is hindered by the complexity of the term ‘minority’. When looking at the island of Ireland, Protestants can be seen as the minority, however, in NI, Catholics are the minority. The United Kingdom has ‘pockets’ of minority groups from Wales to Scotland, and so it remains unclear who constitutes the minority across the board. In NI this translates to a double minority, meaning that each side feels disadvantaged and eligible for protection.

Throughout the history of

the conflict in NI, both sides have changed their rhetoric regarding the definition of a minority. Despite each side’s claim that it is the minority, the population of NI remains un-diverse, with less than one percent of the population belonging to an ethnic community. This figure is changing as immigration increases. As immigration has increased so has the number of hate crimes, with the rate rising 900 percent since the signing of the Belfast Agreement. With the two dominant communities having historically felt discriminated against, why is it that ‘other’ minorities face such unwelcoming conditions?

To start, the conflict is not about the status of one minority group over another, but instead reflects tensions that arise from negotiating conditions between those considered within the community (in-group) or not within the community (out-group). In cases of clear in-groups



Anti-racism graffiti in Belfast, Northern Ireland.
Photo Courtesy of Machine Made via Flickr.

and out-groups, we also see cases where the in-group is defined as the negative of the out-group. In the case of NI, this would translate to “I am Catholic because I am not Protestant.” These societal boundaries make it difficult for ethnic minorities to be integrated. Racism is sectarianism’s closest cousin. Crimes committed for sectarian reasons were only recently designated as hate crimes under Northern Irish law. This suggests that a more progressive definition of hate crime has been formed, with both racial and sectarian-motivated crimes falling into the same category.

There are economic realities that also serve as motivators for the continuation of a segregated society. Eighty percent of individuals polled in NI thought that migrant workers were mostly taking jobs that other people did not want, and more than 50 percent thought that migrant workers were placing a

strain on local housing, education, and the health care systems. These public sentiments do not yield a welcoming environment. These types of reactions by the public validate the view of in-groups and out-groups, particularly in relation to ethnic minorities. With more out-groups, the negative definition of an in-group also grows.

Seventy-four percent of people in NI welcome the fact that other European Union citizens are free to live and work in NI, but 73 percent said that there should be restrictions placed on those coming from Eastern Europe. These statistics suggest that there is no ideological opposition to individuals coming into NI, but certain groups are not welcomed. Sectarianism and racism are both based on wide-ranging stereotypes of the ‘other’ side. Add to this the anecdotal evidence that many minorities are grouped into either the Protestant or Catholic camp, and you have a blurring of many

divisions. A negative reaction to the Protestant community can transfer to a negative reaction towards the minorities associated with them.

In NI, a system has been designed to appease the two feuding sides. This leaves all other communities on their own to fend for their position within the system. The continued separation of public services is not sustainable, neither from a fiscal perspective nor for the promotion of sustainable peace. Diversity cannot be about overall statistics but must instead be about the statistics of any given street. NI’s population is becoming more diverse overall, but any given street is 98 percent the same; eventually this discrepancy will create tensions, and arguably these tensions have already arisen.

At the time of the signing of the Belfast Agreement, the two primary political parties were widely considered to be moderate parties, capable of bridging the gap between the two extremes that were represented by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein. However, it was the DUP and Sinn Fein that held the majority stake in the recent elections, with the moderate political parties suffering heavy losses. For ethnic minorities, this polarizing political environment does not bode well for the promotion of multicultural values. It was largely unanticipated that the more hard-line political parties would gain electoral support in the decade following the Belfast Agreement.

As each political party

focuses on appealing to its own group, the attitudes of each group polarize resulting in a more separated system. In a system that is based on equality, this is an intriguing struggle to have. The two communities in NI continue to exist in a segregated yet relatively peaceful society, a fact which says more about how far the system must progress than about how far it has come. Separate but equal under the law does not lead to a united and flourishing society.

The fate of ethnic minorities in NI remains closely tied to identity politics. With concepts of minorities generally

fluid, the legal protections remain unsteady. The European Union’s equality legislation, as well as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), has been a saving grace in ensuring that equal protection is maintained. However, shadow reports submitted by the NI Council on Ethnic Minorities demonstrate the significant gaps NI’s Parliament still must bridge.

Finally, legal protection does not equal physical protection. A 900 percent increase in the number of hate crimes since the signing of the Belfast Agreement

is alarming. It communicates the extent of division that still exists, and the dire need for a strong commitment from all parties to continue the conflict transformation process. This process could be greatly hindered if politics continue to polarize the population. Ethnic minorities in NI are growing, and efforts must be made to address integration and security for people to live and work.

Noreen Leahy

Environmental Studies '13

◆ ————— ◆

Is One Enough: Implementing A One-State Solution for Israel and Palestine

Mainstream media and American political discourse have continually ignored the one-state solution as a viable option for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The concept has been dismissed as too radical, though its background points to a history older than Israel and is rooted in the basic tenets of democracy and justice. The more prominent alternative, the two-state solution formalized in the 1993 Oslo Accords, has not provided any substantive progress toward peace.

Rather than discuss the need to end the conflict, it is imperative at this moment to consider the need for creative and fundamental rethinking of the specific and time-bound approaches to resolution. The current iteration of the peace

process, based around a two-state solution, has been ongoing but unproductive for more than 20 years. In his book *One Country*, Ali Abunimah argues that “it is vital to show both peoples that there is another way: we must insist on a debate over alternatives to the two-state solution that will allow each community to secure its rights, identity, and legitimacy by embracing the other as equal.” As the current process is decidedly not achieving results, there must be new thought given to the actors, process, and proposed solutions to bring resolution to the conflict.

The idea of a one-state solution in historic Palestine pre-dates Israel. As early as the 1920s, the idea was first proposed to establish a single democratic

state as a homeland for both Muslims and Jews where they could coexist socially, religiously, and politically. In a 1921 speech in Jerusalem, Winston Churchill remarked that “our [Great Britain’s] promise is a double one. On the one hand we promised to give our help to Zionism, and on the other, we assured the non-Jewish inhabitants that they should not suffer in consequence. Every step you take should therefore be also for the moral and material benefit of all Palestinians.” In fact, partition was not even proposed as a solution until 1937 by the British, a foreign power seeking to ensure the maintenance of its sphere of influence and its colonial empire. This plan was simply proposed as a pragmatic way to ensure

equitable distribution of resources, not as a long-term ideological proposal from which to establish an exclusively Jewish state.

The official partitioning of Palestine occurred in November 1947 with the passage of United Nations (UN) Resolution 181 by the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). Then, as now, there was debate amongst member states between a one and two-state solution, with only a minority favoring a one-state solution. The decision to divide the land has been explained by Ussama Makdisi, who argues that “although UNSCOP recognized that the Arabs were ‘for centuries the indigenous and preponderant’ people in Palestine, Jewish ‘historical association’ and the urgent situation of Jewish refugees in Europe made the committee decide that the ‘extreme solution’ of a single democratic state was out of the question.”

After the Second World War, the international community, eager to resolve the Jewish question and absolve their guilt in having failed to prevent the atrocities of the Nazi holocaust, “sacrificed democracy for expediency in the name of a one-sided humanitarianism.” Although the partition plan was preponderantly beneficial to one side, it was still thought that everyone could benefit from the decision considering that “the plan was based on the hope that the immediate pain of partition would be overcome by the security of mutual statehood that was meant to be engendered in its aftermath.”

The main issue that critics of the two-state solution take fault with here is that “mutual statehood” has never been established. Israel remains an independent and fully functioning, modern state, while the Palestinians have no sovereignty over their own territory or ability for recourse in the international system. The most common historical parallel to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the policy of apartheid enforced in South Africa between 1948 and 1994. This system

“The most recent attempt at a resolution to the conflict was seen in the application by the Palestinian Authority for full Palestinian statehood in the UN.”

institutionalized the separation of white and black South Africans and disproportionately favored the former at the expense of the latter.

Apartheid in South Africa did not end in a negotiated settlement in which the nation was divided into separate states based on ethnicity; instead, it crumbled from the shaky moral foundation that stressed separation rather than unity. The 1994 national elections in which both white and black South Africans participated fairly officially ended apartheid and today all South Africans live in a unified, democratic country. Resolution of the conflict required

a “critical number of white South Africans, under intense internal and external pressure, realized that giving up power was the best way to secure their future”. The international community would have been morally outraged if the solution in South Africa had been complete physical and social division, rather than unity in addressing common interests and identities.

The contemporary Israeli-Palestinian peace-process began in 1993 with the signing of the Oslo Accords, which stipulated that a Palestinian state be established within five-years and provided de facto recognition of Israel, and thus the two-state solution. To date, no substantive progress has been made since this process began. The situation has been equivalent to a “status quo minus”, wherein Israel remains publicly committed to negotiations while simultaneously continuing their policy of settlement expansion and resource acquisition, using a systemized divide-and-conquer approach to Palestine. Today, there are over 500,000 Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories, more the six times the number twenty-years ago. This demonstrates how Israel uses negotiations to actively manage the conflict and maintain their privileged position.

The most recent attempt at a resolution to the conflict was seen in the application by the Palestinian Authority for full Palestinian statehood in the UN. However, this approach, like past efforts, is also not likely to

produce a concrete solution. By seeking Palestinian sovereignty in an institution that recognizes Israel as such, this unilateral action accepts a de jure two-state solution while ignoring underlying issues to a final Palestinian state such as borders, access to resources, administration, and the right of refugee return. Since nothing concrete has been negotiated toward the existence of two-states, nothing would be lost in an attempt to introduce possibilities of a one-state solution.

A one-state solution is not out of reach and gaining traction in light of the failures of the current process. A new generation is emerging and beginning to participate in civil society, and has begun calling for a more inclusive process that emphasizes unity and compassion rather than vengeance and exclusion. The more inclusive and just the actors that ultimately resolve this issue, the more inclusive and just the outcome will be. Ali Abunimah, co-founder of the Electronic Intifada and considered the world’s foremost

academic on the one-state solution argues that, “By talking of a common future and imagining it, we engage in the act of creating it; we introduce a different prospect to endless war. It is only through shattering taboos, questioning long-held assumptions, and articulating a vision that we can move the idea of coexistence in a single state from the far margins to the center of discussion. Simply by admitting the notion to the range of possibilities, we change the landscape.”

A one-state solution will allow all people to “live in and enjoy the entire country while preserving their distinctive communities and addressing their particular needs. It offers the potential to de-territorialize the conflict and neutralize demography and ethnicity as a source of political power and legitimacy”. If the world at large and the actors involved are truly seeking a fully equitable, just, and peaceful end to the conflict, why should attempts be made to deepen existing boundaries with a two-

state solution?

History is not a matter that will ever be able to be negotiated and “it is not the retrieval and representation of the ultimate ‘truth’ that will solve the Palestinian-Israeli question but the appreciation of countless personal, individual unofficial voices and stories that speak of displacement, exile, struggle, violence, and statelessness and of apathy, hope, unity, and fragmentation that together make up Palestine-Israel”. Rather than continuing to negotiate history, actions and treatment of the present need to be brought to bear. The one-state solution is the only way that all voices, religions, histories, and identities can be respected through their incorporation in the establishment of a single nation for its entire people.

*Victoria Porrell
International Affairs ‘14*

Portrait of an Occupier

We have all heard about them, the people who call themselves Occupiers. Some paint them as dirty, lazy, hippies who do not want to work. Others view them as average Americans rightfully upset at the state of America and American society. Are they really all homeless hippies? Or are they average Americans representing

the 99 percent?

It is 7:30 p.m. on a Friday evening in Boston’s Financial District. Among the high-rise buildings, near the offices of Bank of America, State Street, and Putnam Investments, and directly across from the Federal Reserve building is Dewey Square Park. In this park there are tents packed so

tightly together that there is barely room to walk between them. A series of wooden pallets and boards make up streets such as Gandhi Road, which the occupants use to navigate through the tents. Every inch of available space seems to be covered with tents, chairs, wooden boards, people, or dogs. The tents themselves are covered in posters,



Marchers assemble in front of South Station by Dewey Park. Many are holding banners to show support.

Photo Courtesy of sharonkubo via Flickr.

pictures, and slogans. In the heart of the park there are groups of six to a few dozen people sitting or standing, engaged in discussion, listening to a presentation, or even meditating.

People passing by vary in age from late teens to sixties. There seems to be an even mix of gender and race. Most are not clean-shaven or well dressed, but there is no offensive smell or sight that would drive the average person away. In fact, the atmosphere seems very open and accepting. No one questions another's presence or makes another feel unwelcome. There are others walking around, checking out the sights, curious about what's going on. There are volunteers at a food tent serving vegetables and rice, as well as others at the medical tent, equipped with over-the-counter drugs, first aid supplies, and hand sanitizer. It is not immediately obvious, but Occupy Boston is much more

organized than it appears.

At the entrance to the park, off of Summer Street, is an information tent. The tent is packed with flyers and handouts covering the table and walls. Kevin, a 26-year-old South Boston resident, has a Masters degree, a full time job in the environmental and sustainability industry, and a part time job he works on Saturdays. Kevin does not sleep at the park, but devotes an average of four hours to the Occupy movement every weekday after work, and eight hours every weekend. He has been an active Occupier for three weeks and plans to stay on indefinitely. He details how the camp is run, stressing that there is no hierarchal structure; decisions are made by consensus in a General Assembly every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday. Basic needs are met, such as food, clothing, shelter, bedding or tools, with medics and social workers on

site 24/7 to mediate any disputes and deal with health issues.

Kevin details the preparations being made for winter. A winter preparation working group meets every day, winterizing tents and seeking assistance from engineers at MIT. Relationships have been formed with churches and shelters in the area in case of emergencies.

Kevin's family has been generally supportive of his involvement, with some ambivalence. Kevin is not confident that the movement will maintain its positive public perception. He expects coverage will turn negative or dry up, noting that the general strike in Oakland, the first in over 60 years, went relatively ignored by the media. Kevin sees public engagement as key to maintaining positive perception, but notes this will be difficult without media support. While he has not personally experienced any negative reaction from the public, he notes that many Occupiers have faced abuse during marches and protests, and that many politicians and pundits have spewed negative words at the movement. He believes this as a result of a misperception, stating that many seem to think Occupiers are lazy hippies that do not want to work, and just get high and drunk all day. Kevin sees occupying as part of a greater movement that does not have a clear end in sight, and that even when progress is made, "You need to protect the gains that you have."

While talking with Kevin, several other Occupiers wander in

and out of the tent, many of whom are permanent residents at the park. A group of Occupiers can be heard celebrating a companion's birthday, and it starts to become apparent that the dynamic outside the "info" tent is likely much different than inside it. While Kevin makes it clear there is no hierarchy at the camp, he is certainly more informed and in tune with the logistics of the movement than most, and if knowledge is power, then he holds a good deal of power in the camp, whether he applies it or not.

After walking around the camp for a few minutes, I run into a man named Sean, a permanent resident at the camp. Sean is a 26-year-old from Middleboro who has been occupying for two weeks and plans to stay indefinitely. Sean left school at the end of ninth grade and is a part time construction worker. When asked what living as an Occupier is like he joked that there is plenty of food and funding, but not nearly enough hookers.

Throughout his time occupying Sean has developed a few close friendships and a large number a casual friends. In his downtime Sean works out, plays sports, and watches movies. Sean struggled through the storm at the end of October; his tent flooded with about two inches of water and a number of his friends' tents were blown apart by the winds. He has not kept in touch with his family very much and is not sure how they would feel about him being part of the Occupy movement. When it comes to what outsiders think of the movement, Sean says

that he, "don't give a fuck," and tends to laugh at instigators.

In the food tent several volunteers stand behind the tables heating and serving food for hungry Occupiers. Nearby, a 23-year-old Occupier named Will is eating a bowl of rice. He is a college dropout from a Boston suburb. He works two or three times a month as an artist. He has been a full time Occupier for about three weeks. He plans to remain "so long as there is free rent and free food." He compares life at the park to life in any apartment

"In the heart of the park there are groups of six to a few dozen people sitting or standing, engaged in discussion, listening to a presentation, or even meditating."

complex, just with ultra thin walls. He and his fellow Occupiers are friendly and sociable with each other, but not incredibly close. In his downtime he likes to hike and smoke marijuana. The Halloween storm posed no problem, as he is used to living in improvised structures, and was prepared with dry rags, supplied by movement organizers. With an excess of heat blankets he also has no worries about the coming winter.

Will's father assumed he was involved with Occupy Boston before he ever mentioned it. The rest of his family will learn of

his involvement at Thanksgiving, and he is curious to hear what his conservative relatives think. Will does not believe it is very likely his issues with the US economic and political system will be settled anytime soon, and notes that prior to residing in a tent as an Occupier he stayed on friends' couches, following the same ideals.

Wandering to the back portion of the park the pathways disappear and one carefully steps in the open spaces between the tents to meet Donny, 46, who is sitting around a radio with several friends. He is from Lowell, but grew up in Georgia. His last class was in seventh grade and he collects Social Security Disability Insurance. He has been Occupying since day one, September 27. To avoid the harsh winter he is expecting to travel to Phoenix or Los Angeles and join the movement there. He has developed a few close friendships but most are casual. During the Halloween storm he was fortunate to stay at a friend's house after his tent collapsed under the weight of the rain. His friends and family give him their full support, recognizing themselves among the 99 percent. His perception is that outsiders generally hate Occupiers, perceiving them as "free loving hippies." Donny's main gripe is about social security and that the benefits do not often keep pace with inflation and cost of living, but he supports others' causes as well. He hopes that the movement brings about changes that will enable him to have secure housing.

Not all of the people in the camp are Occupiers. There are three volunteers at the medical tent: two students, who are Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) basics from Tufts University; and a Navy veteran who goes by the name Medic. Medic was an EMT in Virginia, served two tours in Iraq dealing with heavy trauma, was a damage-control-man for two years in the Navy, and was a lifeguard for five years before that. This is Medic's second time on the site and his impression is that the majority of the people living at the park are those with nowhere else to go and, "looking for a place to squat, and get fucked up."

His tasks so far have revolved around dealing with disorderly conduct as a result

of drinking and residents with mental health issues. His concern going forward is exposure, which he sees as the real test for the movement. There is an effort to get pallets and concrete blocks to elevate the tents to avoid flooding. While basic supplies come by the plenty, he sees a strong need for an automated external defibrillator and extra blankets. Medic makes sure to emphasize that his interests are the people, not the politics.

If one thing is clear, it is that no general picture can accurately portray those involved in the Occupy Boston movement. My last walk through the camp is somewhat sad, as the picture feels unfinished. Every person has his or her own story, but there are just too many to hear tonight. An elderly

man is dressed in a nice suit. One woman is pregnant and hoping to head south for the winter, another is sporting an impressive goatee. There are dozens of people, dozens of viewpoints, and dozens of stories.

The Occupy movement is real and so are its people. They may not all be equally committed, but all participate. They cannot be summed up in a word or a phrase. No single person is representative of the whole. At least in that regard they are truly reflective of the 99 percent of America.

*Chris Turney
Finance '14*

A Dictator's Last Chapter

It is April 1998 and lunch is almost over at the Al Kawakbi School. The "Chanting Period" has started, with the instructor leading, "Our president forever," and the students and I replying, "The President Hafez al-Assad." It was a hard notion to grapple as a child that one man would rule for his entire life. I asked myself many times how Hafez al-Assad could possibly believe he should be our president forever. But to ponder these thoughts out loud was prohibited in my country because of the lack of freedom of expression. I asked my father about these matters, but he was afraid to tell me the truth, even

when we were alone.

On June 10, 2000, President Hafez al-Assad passed away, and the presidency was transferred to his son Bashar al-Assad, as if he had been crowned Syria's next monarch. Since the start of his presidency, contrary to his father's administration, Bashar al-Assad tried to project a positive image of himself to the Syrian people. He tried to change the militaristic image that his father had held, and to appear as a gentle, warm-hearted president while simultaneously maintaining the dictatorship and oppression of his regime. He also wanted to appear directly responsible for developing

the nation and bringing it into the twenty-first century.

With the change in leadership, Syrians hoped to see reform to the political and economic system that had been unchanged for forty years since the Baathist takeover. Unfortunately, the economy had gotten worse, with unemployment increasing and the education system producing insufficient human capital.

Last December, the Arab Spring began with the Tunisian uprising that saw the departure of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. This was closely followed by the January 25 Revolution in Egypt. Syrian youth, including myself,

monitored both revolutions closely, waiting for the spark that would ignite an uprising against Bashar al-Assad's regime.

It is February 17, 2011: A policeman hits someone in Damascus, and a massive demonstration is launched in support of the victim. The news is surprising, given Syria's unpreparedness for this kind of situation. With this news, I saw the happiness in my friends' faces. It was the spark they had long been waiting for.

It is March 15, 2011: Political prisoners' families start a demonstration in the center of Damascus demanding their loved ones' freedom. This date will come to mark the formal start of the Syrian Revolution.

Initially, hope was widespread among many citizens, especially after the success of the Egyptian people in toppling the regime of Hosni Mubarak. Syrians felt they had the right to be free as well. Fear was a significant factor too, as it had existed among Syrians since Hafez al-Assad's presidency. Fear affected the uprising's growth, with many Syrians remembering the 1982 Hama massacre that left thousands of civilians dead. Additionally, the mukhabarat, or secret police, were widely known to make citizens disappear who appeared not to support the Assad regime.

Bashar al-Assad's popularity initially drove the Syrian people to ask merely for reforms, despite the killing of dozens of people in Daraa during the first two weeks of protest. The

president's popularity fell after his first speech since the revolution began when he scoffed at the demonstrators and their demands. Syrians were disappointed, with many feeling a new resentment to a formerly popular leader. Getting people into the streets would be much more of a challenge because of this rampant fear. Bashar al-Assad's popularity, which the regime relied upon throughout the past 11 years, was great enough to make the uprising different from other revolutions in the region. This is because many continue to see al-Assad as a reformer and a protector of minorities in a highly diverse country.

The revolution took off when the people of Hama began to demonstrate. Hama, which suffered heavily during the 1982 massacre, brought huge momentum and made the revolution into a significant story. On the first day of protests in Hama, at least 65 people were killed by the secret

police. A month later, Hama's demonstrations grew to more than 500,000 protesters with amazing chants, captivating the hearts and minds of Syrians everywhere.

This was a milestone in the uprising. The huge number of protesters against the regime helped to break down a significant part of the fear obstacle. Syrian people began to believe that their revolution would never subside without major changes. After almost eight months of protesting, the Syrian people have two demands: justice for the victims, and the downfall of the Assad regime. All of this started eight months ago with requests for simple reforms, but the chants today have escalated to demanding the fall of the regime and the hanging of the president.

The Syrian people have refused any kind of external military interference, but after more than 3,500 citizens were killed and more than 40,000 taken



A young boy joins others in protesting for a free Syria.
Photo Courtesy of Shaam News Network.

as prisoners, they are now asking the international community and the United Nations to put more pressure on this regime to stop the killing. The Syrian revolution is now mature in all aspects, with hundreds taking creative steps to help bring about the downfall of the regime. Thousands of activists are working on documenting protests and killings by government forces while spreading the word to the outside world.

The Syrian government's propaganda continuously calls protesters terrorists, while nothing is further from the truth. The peaceful nature of the Syrian people remains their greatest weapon, providing protection and legitimacy, while the regime continues to kill protesters and use

exceptionally brutal tactics. The Syrian people are committed to bringing about meaningful change through peaceful means.

Homs, Syria's third largest city has become the capital of the revolution, with more than 1,000 people killed and continuous demonstrations in each neighborhood. The city's determination and persistence has caused it to be shelled by artillery fire from the army. Every day the number of dead increases, suppressing hope for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. At the same time, I grow increasingly certain that the revolution will succeed, as does every Syrian who dreams for the freedom that most of the rest of the world enjoys.

The Syrian revolution

includes Syrians from all races, sects and classes – even Alawites, who belong to the sect of the president and his main supporters. This diversity has allowed the revolution to spread to all cities, towns and villages. This diverse opposition is possible because of a common goal among Syrians: the desire to build a civilian government based on free and fair elections containing all political parties, allowing Syrians to exercise their human rights to achieve a decent and peaceful life.

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Movie Review: *Microphone*

Last September director Ahmad Abdalla released his second feature film, *Microphone*, which received a warm reception from the international film community. The film was praised as a magnificent artistic achievement in a variety of international film festivals. In the aftermath of Egypt's revolution the film provides valuable insight into Mubarak's Egypt. It follows protagonist Khaled as he returns home to Alexandria after years spent living as an expatriate in the United States. Though the film focuses on the underground music scene in Alexandria, Western audiences will find the peripheral

motifs of brain drain, defeatism, police abuse, and political representation particularly relevant in light of recent events.

There are a few aspects of the film that limit its effectiveness at storytelling. For example, the sheer number of characters introduced in the beginning makes remembering how they are related to one another more difficult than it should be. Moreover, it is hard to connect with the film's protagonist Khaled, though the creative inverse timeline used to show Khaled's last encounter with his ex-paramour works well enough in explaining the main character's

situation that this difficulty is forgiven by the viewer. The music in the film serves its purpose well, though it might be unfamiliar to American audiences. Regardless, it is a must see for those that want to better understand life in Mubarak's Egypt, as it provides a unique perspective on the social challenges facing the country. The film portrays Egypt in a more organic form than one can find in most political analysis.

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