

Roger Pilon Vice President for Legal Affairs, Cato Institute :

Wisner was half right, but on the Mubarak half he was almost certainly wrong. Transitions are messy - at best. Ask the French about theirs two centuries and more ago. Occasionally they're done pursuant to existing constitutions. Ours from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution wasn't, despite which it wasn't all that messy. We were lucky. We had a relatively healthy culture and strong leaders, even if the early years were often touch and go, as we sometimes forget.

It appears, from press accounts, that the current Egyptian constitution does not provide for the kind of transition that many would like to see. If so, then extra-constitutional measures will need to be taken, including perhaps the drafting and ratification of a new or at least an interim constitution, or more likely some less formal arrangement through which interim authority can be brought into being with a semblance of legitimacy about it - whether a new government or a new constitution and ratification process. A simple call for elections is too simple: by whom, under what procedures, to fill what offices, in what institutions?

All of this is where politics in its most elemental form comes to the fore, for better or worse, as the French saw to their horror. It's the ultimate test of a culture. So Wisner was right about "the potential for a power vacuum" -- although in Egypt the army is likely to fill that vacuum - and in recognizing that a vacuum should be avoided, if possible. But he was likely wrong to suggest that Mubarak should fill that vacuum or serve as a transitional figure since it appears that he no longer has the credibility to do so. Ideally, leaders with credibility need to emerge, and soon.