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A different view of Washington

'Achievement summit' brings intellectual rebels together in D.C.



(Tracy A. Woodward/The Washington Post) - Khaled Elmufti helped Libyan rebels keep their mobile phone communications operating during the uprising against Moammar Gaddafi.

By Manuel Roig-Franzia, Published: October 28, 2012 [E-mail the writer](#)

Rebels launched grenades. They fired rifles. They threw rocks.

They were the ones making noise in the streets as [Libyans rose last year](#) against Moammar Gaddafi.

But another rebel — an entirely different sort of revolutionary, a thoroughly modern insurgent — toiled in secrecy and silence.

He was the hacker.

Khaled Elmufti, a soft-spoken rebel with a degree in network security, worked alongside the hacker, an anonymous tinkerer who deployed his gifts for entering code-locked digital spaces with speed and efficiency. What Elmufti and the hacker wanted was a way for Libyans to talk to one another. [Gaddafi wanted the opposite](#): He was preparing to shut down the nation's mobile telephone network.

But Elmufti's team found a work-around: They knew that a company had transported a

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▶ sample mobile-network control device to Benghazi and left it behind after making its sales pitch. The hacker figured out a way to tap into the device, known as a “home location register,” and reconfigure it to carry calls for 800,000 users, rather than its original capacity of 10,000. When Gaddafi turned off the national mobile phone system, the rebels turned theirs on. Later they were able to tell the world about government atrocities by stretching an Internet line across the Libyan border to Egypt, says Elmufti, a technology adviser to the interim Libyan government who now runs a high-tech research-and-development firm based in Libya.

“The revolution is not about technology, but technology definitely played an important role,” Elmufti says over espresso in the Off the Record bar, downstairs at the Hay-Adams hotel.

Elmufti’s account of high-risk digitized adventure in the midst of the Arab Spring held special resonance for the men and women with whom he’d communed over the past few days. They, too, are tinkerers. Social media whizzes. Encryption aces. Thinkers. Innovators. Rebels.

They were pulled together, drawn here from countries across the planet, by two of Washington’s behind-the-scenes aggregators of star power: Wayne and Catherine Reynolds. Catherine Reynolds is a philanthropist with an interest in the arts. Wayne Reynolds oversees a nonprofit called the Academy of Achievement, which gathers some of the world’s most successful politicians, political figures and artists to share their experiences with promising young people. The organization was founded in 1961 by Wayne Reynolds’s father, a famed Sports Illustrated photographer who captured some of the athletic world’s most iconic images of the 1940s and 1950s before changing his name from Hy Peskin to Brian Blaine Reynolds.

The rosters of speakers for the organization’s annual “achievement summits” tend to be dazzling displays of marquee names. Bono? Steven Spielberg? Steve Jobs? Oh yes, they’ve all appeared over the years. You want political mojo? How about former president Bill Clinton? Yep. Desmond Tutu? Him, too.

During this year’s five-day summit, Elmufti and fellow delegates from 29 other countries heard from Nobel Prize winners — chemistry honoree Roger Tsien and physics laureate Adam Riess. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta considered the group sufficiently important that he came to speak — then returned a second day to speak again. When the group dined at the U.S. Supreme Court, four justices joined . . . and took questions.

Delegates buzzed about a poignant question asked by Rodrigo Nivonog Serrano Levin, a floppy-haired summit attendee who is a Mexican college student. Serrano Levin has convened tens of thousands of young Mexicans via social media networks to press for a rewrite of his country’s much-maligned and frequently disrespected Constitution. Why, Serrano Levin wanted to know, do Americans respect their Constitution? The answer he got from the justices was a homage to the Constitution as a document that emphasized a single, sublime phrase: “We the people.”

“That was incredible,” Serrano Levin recalled as he sat alongside fellow delegates for an elegant luncheon in a U.S. State Department reception room.

“This,” Serrano Levin said, “is definitely the finest, the most expensive meal I have ever eaten.”

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At the podium, Ann Stock, an assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs, praised the group as righteous "troublemakers." The room where they dined was a fitting locale, she said. After all, it was named for a man she called one of America's "original" troublemakers, a man who employed the technology of his day with the same passion as Serrano Levin and Elmufti employ today's. That man's name was Benjamin Franklin.

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Khaled Elmufti wrote:

10/29/2012 12:15 PM EST

The Libyan revolution was not about individuals, and definitely not about me! The people of Libya finally decided, after four decades of oppression, to be free. The people were willing to pay, and paid, a huge price in blood. The Libyan martyrs, most of them young men in their twenties, gave their today's and tomorrow's on behalf of us all. I was merely a part of the team of Libyan people. Technology played an important role, but it was merely an 'enabler'. I was honored to work with a pan Libyan team of technologists, including overseas Libyans. Special mention needs to be made of Engineer Haitam Belras Ali who took the lead in restoring the mobile network. Engineer Maftah Alatharam, Engineer Ahmed Almehdawi, Dr Anwar Elfeitori and numerous Engineers working with Libyana, Almadar, Hatif, LTT and private sector organisations deserve full credit. Overseas credit is due to many people especially those Libyans who supported us from UAE, Qatar and the Libyan Special Committee based in Tunisia. The martyr's have left us with the immense responsibility of ensuring that their blood was not shed in vain

Khaled Elmufti



fatma banka wrote:

10/29/2012 12:49 PM EST

congratulation khaled you really deserve that you work hard to help libyan people when there weren't any telecommunications goodluck my cousine god bless you

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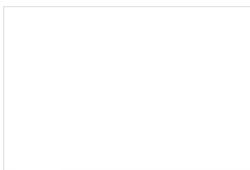
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