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Students, faculty discuss Middle East political unrest

campus-news

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KOKOMO, Ind. – Concerns and interest in the current political turmoil on the other side of the world was apparent Tuesday afternoon as Indiana University Kokomo students and faculty informally discussed recent events in the Middle East.

During a forum sponsored by the IU Kokomo History/Political Science Program and the American Democracy Project, about 20 students and faculty members gathered into Kelley Student Center for the discussion led by history and political science faculty Andrew McFarland, Sarah Heath and Todd Bradley.

“I was happy with the level of good participation from students and faculty,” said McFarland, coordinator of history/political science. “This is the second forum we have held. The first was the Egypt and Democracy Forum in February, but there was less discussion because we had only scheduled an hour for the forum. We really want to promote discussion in these events so they don’t consist of just faculty presentations.”

Adding insight to the event was Kasem Kasem, chemistry professor at IU Kokomo and Egypt native who taught at Fateh University in Libya more than 20 years ago.

“Unless Moammar Gadhafi is removed from power, Libya’s civil war will continue for a very long time,” said Kasem. “If someone asks Gadhafi, he says he is just a philosopher and the people have the power. In reality, the country’s money is held by him and his family. He is powerful, not because his people like him, but because he is very cold blooded and kills those who disagree with him. Gadhafi is very much into taking hostages. Countries respond to him, not because he’s a great negotiator, but because he takes hostages. I hated Gadhafi because he suppressed his people. I was very happy to see the revolution start.”

McFarland noted Libya’s civil war has recently taken precedence in the media over Egypt’s protestors continued fight for freedom and democracy.

“While protests in Egypt seem to have gone off the media radar, it’s not as if Egypt’s story is over,” said McFarland. “There are still political battles in Egypt, but because of the NATO’s involvement in Libya, especially with United States forces there, the media has focused on Libya’s warfare.”

Of interest to several at the forum was why NATO and the U.S. became involved with Libya's battle, and not responded to other countries' unrests.



"That point has been brought up and is a very difficult situation for President Barack Obama," said Bradley. "Basically, if the U.S. has an economic interest, that tends to override civil rights."

Heath noted at the forum that some Americans have been upset because President Obama deployed military to Libya without first receiving Congressional approval.

"Although the general preference is to pursue Congressional approval before deploying troops, it's only happened that way five times in U.S. history," said Heath. "The President has other Constitutional rules he can use. With the War Powers Act, the President can engage U.S. forces in military action up to 90 days before receiving Congressional approval."

McFarland said history/political science faculty hopes to host possibly two forums each semester to address current world and national issues and the future effects on society.

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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