

Arab Spring -- Middle East Realignment –
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Focus on Libya, Egypt, Syria
by Elizabeth Hall

As a byproduct of the uprisings, favorable perception of the U.S. in Egypt and Libya has sagged. What should the U.S. do to reestablish and reinvigorate its image and reputation in those countries?

The U.S. is a longtime supporter of human rights, but our actions are often contradictory. We should support the democracies, but not try to move them in directions we favor. We should be true to our democratic beliefs—not hypocrites. What we are seeing may be a worldwide movement, not just confined to Arab countries.

But what should we do if we get a regime that's hostile to the U.S.?

I'm not convinced that the Arab Spring is a move toward democracy. It may simply be a regime change. These countries don't have the required infrastructure for democracy. The internet is an exciting movement. It's speeded things up.

The situation changes from day to day. The age of the internet may be speeding things up—but on both sides.

American foreign policy has tended to focus on the balance of power. Maybe we should just back away. Negotiate not with an overall strategy that tries to take the whole chessboard into account, but on a country-by-country basis. Change our policy from what we should do to what we can do.

We have to work on a case-by-case basis. The Middle East is not a single entity with unified views. We don't know how these new regimes will work. So we need to work on a slow but focused basis.

Should we be engaging not just nation states but organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Should we work with the organizations on a secret basis?

Yes, we should be working with the organizations. We need to talk to people we've never talked to before. Engage them in a dialogue.

Whenever the U.S. makes inroads with powers within a country instead of the government, we get into trouble. It's very dangerous. We want to foster democracy while still protecting oil interests.

The U.S. will become less dependent on foreign oil, but not for a long time.

With budget cuts rampant, how do we keep answering the need for foreign aid?

Only 1 percent of our budget goes for foreign aid, even though it gets a lot of the public attention.

We have two major interests in the Middle East: oil and Israel. Israel must be considered our 51st state. It is our presence in the Middle East. Issues need to be considered as those that affect Israel and those that don't.

Question 2: If Palestine's bid at the U.N. for statehood recognition results in escalating regional violence, what impact will it likely have on the three countries?

The best thing the U.S. could do is support Palestine's request for full membership in the U.N.

Dov Waxman (Baruch College; spoke at Chappaqua Great Decisions) felt that the Palestine-Israeli negotiations were extremely important and that we must do what we can to get them going. We really need to push Israel to negotiate. But Netanyahu thinks the status quo is just fine.

Palestinians think that the negotiations have hurt them. Palestine is now looking to the South African model.

What are the carrots and what are the sticks? We lost an opportunity by opposing the Palestinian bid without any concessions from Israel. It's going to be difficult to avoid vetoing the bid. But we need to move. Israel now has all the cards. Our support of Palestine would give Palestinians a card. We should have said, we won't veto Palestine's request for full membership unless you freeze the settlements. Obama didn't bring up his earlier statement about freezing the settlements in his recent U.N. speech.

Here's a philosophical question: When should the U.S. take steps to intervene in another country? Libya is a case in point. What a downer for the Arab spring if the revolt failed. NATO tipped the balance in this case.

Tribalism is still strong in the area. Are the uprisings just a momentary thing?

Add a third general category to Oil and Israel: Terrorism. We don't know whether the Muslim Brotherhood will revert to its policy of supporting terrorism.

Tribalism is still strong in Afghanistan, Sudan, Northern Egypt. In some of these countries, tribalism is still strong, but quiet. Rebels don't seem to be doing much besides showing up and waving their weapons. Guys who fire guns in the air are not the best of partners.

Our Declaration of Independence calls for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." You can't have the second two without the first.

Tyrants often play a role in maintaining peace and stability. And in supporting them, we often engage in wishful thinking. 48 hours before Mubarak was driven out of power, Secretary of State Clinton assured us that he was maintaining stability.

Before you depose a Saddam, you need a plan.

What if Libya degenerates into a total tribal war? Should we intervene?

If you were in the State Department, would you intervene? I'd send in NATO?

Turkey is becoming a dominant power. After the president of Turkey made anti-Israeli remarks, he noted that Turkey had a secular regime. As Ataturk (military) influence declines, religious elements have risen in Turkey, but they have been held in check.

So what should U.S. foreign policy be? There's no easy answer. You have to have short-term and long-term goals. Sometimes you have to do something you don't want to do so you can do something you want to do.

Seems to me that we're following the playbook in Fareed Zakaria's book, *The Post-American World*. Let Europe do some things.

The winds are changing dramatically. Once we didn't know the difference between Sunni and Shia. We think Sunnis are good because Iran is Shia. But we forget that Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda are Sunni.

Bahrain presents a special problem. Its population is Shia, but it's run by Sunnis. We don't interfere in Bahrain, because the 5th fleet is based there.

Look at Saudi Arabia. The King is aware of what's going on in Arab Spring. He's decided that he must make changes before there is an uprising in his country. He's promised to give women the vote. He's shoved hundreds of millions of \$s into the economy. The sentencing of a woman to 10 lashes for driving was reversed. But in the age of Twitter, his changes may not be fast enough.

In Saudi Arabia, some people still remember when even men did not have to right to vote. The first municipal elections (for men only) took place in 1939.

Israel is regarded as our 51st state. Was that determined by the people? We supported Mubarak until he was deposed. Was that determined by the people? Where we fail in foreign affairs is where we fail in our own democracy.

Other countries don't think of us as the source of peace and justice. We'd like to think of ourselves this way.

We don't have a national ideology or identity any more.

The U.S. image has changed tremendously. Once we were well-respected, a source of fairness and justice. But since 9/11/2001, our image has cratered because of our reaction to 9/11.

Until campaign financing is reformed, our policies are unlikely to change.