

A Forecast for the Middle East

The Reemergence of an Islamic Caliphate in the Midst of the Arab Spring

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Abstract

The Middle East region is inherently volatile and associated with radical religious behavior. Beginning in December of 2010, a Tunisian street vendor inspired a wave of revolutions and protests launched by the people of many Middle Eastern countries, demanding regime change and democratic ideals. This season of revolution, dubbed the Arab Spring, has been characterized as both a period of Enlightenment in the Arab world and a cause for concern for Western powers.

This thesis will approach the Arab Spring in light of the ideologies and influences swarming into the power vacuum left by the recently deposed governments. It will assess the nature and likelihood of a reemergence of an Islamic Caliphate and the practice of Dhimmitude, recognizing the importance of the recent political developments in Egypt. Finally, it will encourage a stronger bond between the United States and Israel in order to preserve the last true influence of Western Civilization in the Middle East.

The Reemergence of an Islamic Caliphate in the Midst of the Arab Spring

Beginning of the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring was ignited in Tunisia in late 2010 after a local street vendor set himself on fire in protest against his government, an act that led to a wave of protests and revolutions across Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, and Jordan (Arab Spring; Op-Ed). In 2011, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled from Tunisia to Saudi Arabia in January, and in February President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt resigned, thus ending his 30-year rule. Muammar Gaddafi of Libya was deposed in August 2011 and killed in October of that same year. Provincial governmental bodies have assumed control in the wake of these revolutions, promising the electorate democratic elections and reforms. Regional unrest erupted in the surrounding countries as the people became inspired by their neighbors to revolt against the status quo.

The Arab Spring began, for much of the news media, as an optimistic, enlightened turn of events in the midst of totalitarian regimes. The *New York Times* romanticized the Arab Spring, describing it as the dawn of a period of new hope for the nations that had erupted into revolution over the past year. Many hoped expectantly that economies would improve in the region, thus opening opportunities for foreign investment. As time progressed, however, it became clear that tensions continued to increase and these countries in the midst of revolution would remain unstable. The *Financial Times* reported that "between the beginning of the year and the height of Arab spring tensions, spreads on Egypt's credit default swaps rose 85 per cent ... they have widened by a further 40 per cent" (para. 2). The *Financial Times* is one of many sources advising investors to "give the Arab spring more time" (para. 2), noting that the expectations of the revolutionary nations are far too high, both politically and economically, for peace to reign anytime in

the near future (Arab spring, 2011). However, the financial instability produced by the Arab Spring should not be at the forefront of the world's concerns.

At face value, these uprisings have been demonstrations by the people in protest of their authoritarian governments. The governments have been blamed for high levels of unemployment, terrible economic conditions, and high corruption. However, these original protests and arguably valid grievances against the respective governments have not been well organized. The uprisings were often led by amateurs and students reacting passionately to a desire for change. Due to this lack of leadership, more organized groups have moved in to the driver's seat of the revolutions, effectively hijacking the goals and intents of the original protestors. Ambassador Marc Ginsberg stated:

... Islamist parties are going to gain more influence because real economic grievances cannot be addressed by youth movements. And there's not enough money among the non-oil producing countries to fulfill the economic and social grievances that gave the youth the power to cause these revolts in the first place.

(Expert briefings, 2011, 44)

Radical leaders are making grabs at power via the democratic means long-awaited in the region. The threat of the Muslim Brotherhood and other radical Islamic political entities is ever-increasing in volatile regions, and the influence of these groups in effecting elections is also increasing.

The world is now asking: What's next? Will the Arab nations in disarray be able to pick themselves up and establish a constitutional republic or some type of government featuring equal rights under the Rule of Law? Robert Danin of the Council on Foreign Relations states, "Arab politics has been fundamentally altered in a way that's

irreversible.... The Arab people now have a voice in their own politics" (Smith, 2011, para. 8). Therefore, it is imperative to understand exactly what the people in each erupting country desire. The United States and many other western nations have absolutized an exported form of democracy. However, is this idea of unalienable rights and limited government the same presuppositions Arab citizens have in mind?

The answer to this question, unfortunately, is “no”. Eric Brown, a research fellow for the Hudson Institute, spoke at a conference titled, “Liberty, Democracy, and the New Realities of the Middle East and North Africa conference.” Brown suggested:

... democracy is an enormously difficult societal achievement that can be tough to hold onto—especially in a “Springtime of Peoples” like our present one, with all the passions and ideological zeal which it has unleashed. The progress of human freedom in this part of the world, just as it is everywhere else, will be well-served by a healthy skepticism informed by the tragedy of history, and by a deep awareness of the real and abiding dangers which lie ahead. (Brown, para. 12)

Although the people of the Middle East may truly desire a popularly-elected government and increased liberties, the foundational presuppositions of these people are markedly different from those that form the basis of Western civilization. The majority of the population in these Middle Eastern nations follows some branch of Islam, and thus is held to a law that Westerners do not fully understand: Shari’a Law.

Competing Influences in the Emerging Power Vacuum

Some trends of the recent Arab uprisings are already apparent, including the idealist and fundamental Islamic political entities that have gained significant status as newly “liberated” people vote them into power. The massive power vacuums left by deposed

regimes are filling with groups purporting an inspiring ideology which, interestingly, resembles the beginnings of the ancient Islamic Caliphate.

Dean Tarik Yousef emphasizes that due to a Western lack of desire to involve itself in another protracted war or regional conflict, the United States will not be the main influencer in the region following the wave of regime collapse. Yousef affirms that this attitude reflects a lack of understanding concerning the instability in the Middle East. He argues:

To the extent that they [Western powers] don't respond [in supporting these transitions for countries that need the most commitment to stability and security], others will come in to fill that vacuum. Now, others would mean not just Turkey with its more assertive foreign policy and representation on behalf of the region, but others including China and possibly countries with the financial resources and the economic interests and possibly the geopolitical motives to compete with the U.S., to dislodge the U.S., and to try to carve out more space and a sphere of influence in the Arab world that hasn't been represented, that hasn't been present before. (cited in Expert Briefings, p. 44)

The strategic location and resources found in the Middle East make it a tempting region for imperialistic nations to exercise their power and economic influence. The United States is naïve to believe that other nations and influences in the region will pull out simultaneously, leaving the Middle Eastern nations to develop autonomously. To do so would be to neglect a great opportunity for these nations to expand economically and politically.

Writing for *Sentinel & Enterprise*, Clifford May recalls how over 30 years ago he covered the revolution in Iran, which has many frightening parallels to the current Arab revolutions. He recalls, “I knew young people ... educated, secular, liberal and excited about the fall of the Shah and the prospect of Iran’s rebirth. They firmly believed that the Ayatollah Khomeini not only tolerated them- he valued them” (cited in *Beware the Muslim Brotherhood*, 2011, para. 8). However, as history has recorded, Khomeini turned out to be less friendly with the West than these optimistic young idealists expected. Wasting no time, Iran has already begun to use the Arab Spring to increase its dominance in the Middle East. Iran’s method of seeping in to fill the massive chasms left by the recently reposed regimes is similar to how the Shiite Islamic regime deceived the people of Iran during its own revolution in 1979: It appealed to the population’s general desire for freedom from a protracted authoritarian administration.

The interests and influence of Iran, nicely packaged in the rhetoric and procedures of democracy and representation, are currently being cited by the radical Islamic group calling itself the Muslim Brotherhood. In a “war of ideas,” the Muslim Brotherhood would more than likely fail, as the Arab populations in the midst of the Arab Spring are not all idealistic radical adherents to Shari’a Law (*Beware the Muslim Brotherhood*). However, the Muslim Brotherhood has become a master at political sleight of hand, and the average Arab citizen, as well as the average Western citizen, is handing them power in a blind daze of democratic fervor.

According to John R. Bradley, a journalist with extensive experience in the Middle East, many Muslims in these nations are not Islamic extremists and do not support them. Cited in Hastings’ article in the *Sunday Times*, Bradley maintains that

those who either are Islamic extremists or support them are very politically active, and only between 20-40% of the Arab national electorate choose to participate in elections. Unfortunately, those who choose to vote and involve themselves in the political direction of the nation are those with the most radical ideas (2012).

In *The Spectator*, Douglas Murray (2011) asserts that although elections have taken place in Tunisia as well as Algeria, "they have simply served as a springboard for well-organized Islamist parties to gain power" (para.6). Citing Bradley's analysis of the electorate in Arab nations, Murray agrees that although Islamists may have but a fraction of the vote, they are likely to win as their political movements are extremely well organized. Murray goes on to explain how the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood stronghold in Egypt, deceptively called the "Freedom and Justice party," is continuing to gain political power in the recently shattered Egyptian government (2011).

The Muslim Brotherhood

The United States and the rest of the West must seek to understand the Muslim Brotherhood as it gains political power and influence in many Middle Eastern nations. A proper understanding of this group is vital in crafting an appropriate American response: Is this a force to be recognized and negotiated with, or an organization whose increasing influence could pose a major threat to Western Civilization?

Egypt has long been perceived as the economic and political leader in the modern Middle East. Boasting the largest population of the Arab nations and a strategic location on the Suez Canal, it has been vied after by Western powers for centuries. After Hosni Mubarak was deposed, the Muslim Brotherhood quickly became the dominating political organization in the country. The Muslim Brotherhood has been present in Egypt since it

was founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928, so its existence in the region is not new. However, the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed in many countries, including Egypt until 2011, due to its radical dogma and violent rhetoric (Mills, 2011). Hosni Mubarak had a large part in suppressing Islamist movements within Egypt. Although underground factions such as the Muslim Brotherhood still participated in Egypt's government by influencing legitimate political groups, Mubarak's goal of improving Egypt's relationship with the United States forced him to repress extreme Islamism.

With the collapse of Mubarak's government came the breakdown of its safeguards against radical groups gaining power. The Muslim Brotherhood recognized this opportunity, and not only hijacked the revolution demonstrations, but quickly moved towards negotiations with the replacement regime when it recognized the next power to contend with. Samuel Tadros, a research fellow from the Hudson Institute, published an article emphasizing that, "[t]he Muslim Brotherhood is at the center of the current struggle to shape Egypt's future. Since the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is the mother organization of Arab Islamism, the ramifications of the struggle in Egypt are likely to spill over to other countries in the region" (Tadros, 2011, para. 3).

The Muslim Brotherhood made a huge power grab in the November 2011 elections, collecting 37% of the electorate's ballots in the first of three rounds of elections for the parliament in Egypt (Lynch, 2011, para. 2). The Nour Party, another Islamist group, consisting of ultraconservative Salafis, collected 24% of the vote (Lynch, para. 4). This represents a national shift towards fundamental Islamism, as opposed to the more liberal parties that many hoped would gain the majority of votes. The fact that one of the most powerful nations in this volatile region is coming under control of the radical

Muslim Brotherhood should be disconcerting to the United States as well as every other Western nation. “Even with the severe restrictions imposed on it during the Mubarak regime, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood prided itself on having been the inspiration and intellectual weight behind the emergence of Islamist movements across the Muslim world” (Mneimneh, 2011, 20).

The goal of the Muslim Brotherhood is to establish Allah's law, or Shari'a Law, globally. Shari'a law, the "totalitarian, supremacist politico-military-legal program" (para. 1) as described by Frank Gaffney in the *Washington Times*, is currently practiced in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Somalia, and Sudan (Gaffney, 2011b). The gradual transition in Arab nations from secular government to a government adhering to Shari'a Law promotes the reemergence of the Islamic State, the Khalifa, known in English as the Caliphate. The mission statement of the Muslim Brotherhood is found in one of its recently discovered documents, the “Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America” which states:

The process of settlement is a “Civilization-Jihadist Process”.... The Ikhwan must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and “sabotaging” its miserable house by their hands... so that it is eliminated and God's religion is made victorious over all other regions... It is a Muslim's destiny to perform Jihad and work wherever he is... and there is no escape from that destiny except for those who choose to slack. (Akram, 1991, 4)

According to this Memorandum, the Muslim Brotherhood has two main goals. First, it strives to implement Shari'a law worldwide, and second, it works to restore a

global Islamic State. A panel of national security experts, organized by the Center for Security Policy, emphasizes that according to these goals of the Muslim Brotherhood, "...al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood have the same objectives. They differ only in the timing and tactics involved in realizing them" (Gaffney, 2011a, para. 4).

The Threat of a Reinvigorated Caliphate: Islamic Empires and Dhimmitude

In order to understand this emerging region of Isalmist-run nation-states, the United States must first look back to the last true Islamic Empire, then to the current manifestation of an emerging empire striving to attain to the ancient Caliphate. In Bat Ye'or's book *The Dhimmi*, she describes the segregated culture of the Islamic Empires of history. These societies were split between two classes: the *Umma* and the *Dhimmi*. The *Umma* consists of members of the Islamic community, the avowed Muslims of an empire. The term *dhimma* comes from the treaty bringing an end to Muhammad's siege of the oasis of Kaybar in 629 A.D. Ye'or asserts:

After a siege lasting a month and a half, the inhabitants surrendered under the terms of a treaty known as the Dhimma.... Muhammad allowed the Jews to continue cultivating their oasis, on condition that they ceded to him half of their produce; he also reserved the right to break the agreement and expel them whenever he wished. (Ye'or, 1997, 44)

Following this agreement, all of the remaining Jewish and Christian communities under Muhammad's control surrendered to Muhammad and the ruling Muslims under the Dhimma's terms. Those subjected to the Dhimma were thus referred to as dhimmis.

Ye'or also clarifies the origin of jihad, writing that "the primary guiding principle of the jihad was to summon the non-Muslims to convert to or accept Muslim supremacy,

and, if faced with refusal, to attack them until they submitted to Muslim domination" (Ye'or, 45). Muhammad's siege of the oasis of Kaybar is just one example of the jihad in action. She explains that the low condition of the dhimmi in the Islamic Empire is a consequence of jihad, as Muslims are compelled to either convert or kill their enemies, or force them to live as a second-class citizen in their society.

As opposed to being a strictly historical work, Ye'or ends her book with a warning to the modern West. She explains that Western nations must understand that the development of a nation-state run purely by Islamic law is inherently incapable of practicing democracy and republican principles as understood by the United States and other countries. She argues that the ultimate goal of jihad is "the suppression of political and military independence of infidel nations" (Ye'or, 116). Ye'or cites the Palestine Liberation Organization's Covenant, which not only calls for a reinvigorated jihad against Israel, but also blatantly states: "Therefore the aim of the Palestinian revolution is to liquidate this entity [Israel] in all its aspects, political, military, social, trade unions and cultural, and to liberate Palestine completely" (Ye'or, 116).

A significant portion of the book is spent describing the condition of dhimmitude, explaining that these individuals and communities of non-Muslims have been historically "marginalized by their inferior status," but have also been seen as the enemies of the State, a convenient scapegoat. Ye'or maintains, "Excluded from a society that only tolerated them the better to exploit and degrade them... in times of instability, brute instincts and political and economic frustrations are unleashed, leading to pillage and massacre" (Ye'or, 1997). Ye'or asserts that Israel's right to national sovereignty and self-defense would be a "complete reversal of contemporary Arab values ..." (Ye'or, 129).

Not only is Israel an inherent and eternal enemy to any Muslim nation, but any ally of Israel's will find itself equally hated and at odds with Israel's enemies.

Ye'or makes a convincing case for the argument that dhimmitude was not merely a social construction of the past, but is currently a threat for any individual not adhering to Islam, dwelling in an Islamic nation-state. She also shrewdly warns that any Muslim following a true, literal interpretation of the Qur'an will understand jihad to be a calling to every follower of Islam. But Ye'or's analysis of dhimmitude and the Islamic caliphate has more to do with the Arab Spring and the power vacuum left by deposed regimes than may appear from the onset. Although Islam has dominated for centuries in this region, the secular administrations of Mubarak, Qaddafi, and others offered relative protection to religious minorities in their respective countries. However, as evidenced in Egypt, the likelihood of the reemergence of dhimmitude is increasingly likely.

The Reemergence of Dhimmitude

According to Oren Dorell in *USA Today*, the political atmosphere in the Middle East is increasingly hostile to religious minorities, especially Christians and Jews. As conditions are worsening for these groups, specifically in Egypt and Tunisia, the trends toward a government dominated by Islamic law and adherence to dhimmitude become very possible. Although Coptic Christians in Egypt had been persecuted by the Muslim majority for years, they demonstrated against Mubarak alongside Muslims. However, following Mubarak's ousting, the new military regime actually worsened conditions for Christians. The article cites an example of Copts who were attacked by the Egyptian military while protesting in Cairo, among other injustices.

After decades under Mubarak, Egypt's first free elections gave a large majority of political power to Muslim Brotherhood and radical Salafi candidates, not a moderate group focused on democratic principles. In *Newsweek International* Habib Malik argues, "Egypt's moderate and pluralist-minded revolutionaries are proving impotent in the face of determined religious extremists and hostile armed forces of the indifferent authorities" (2011, para. 8). Many are beginning to take note of the radical Islamic groups that have hijacked the once purely democratic-driven desires of the local Arab citizens. In his article, Malik focuses specifically on the Copts of Egypt, a group that has understood religious and political persecution in the past. Douglass Murray agrees with Malik's analysis, noting that "the increasing persecution of the remaining Jews and Christians in the region is being studiously ignored by the West," as he discusses the increasing number of Islamist laws being imposed on the population of Libya.

As in ancient Islamic republics, these new governments will use Jews and Christians as scapegoats. Bar maintains that new regimes "will not succeed in delivering the promises of the revolution in a short period of time and will be swift to point the finger at the enemy within and without: at the pro-Western secularists, Israel, and the United States" (2011, para. 10). The risk of Shari'a dominated governments and a possible resurgence of dhimmitude in the Middle East is quite possible, and one would expect Western nations, especially the United States, to take decisive action in the region. Nations adhering to Shari'a law have proven to be quite hostile to the United States. Since the Iranian Shah was deposed in 1979, Iran has been the prime example of how the United States should not react under the threat of Islamic ideology coming to control an already explosive nation. However, the actions of the Obama Administration, both

prescriptive and reactive, have been contradictory and extremely detrimental to American influence in the region. Many of the actions taken by this Administration have not only decreased true American influence in the Middle East, but have allowed Islamic radicalism to gain a foothold.

The Western Reaction to the Arab Spring

The Western reaction to the escalation of religious and political tensions in the Middle East has been, at best, conflicted. Unfortunately, many of the regime changes called for by the Obama Administration have contributed to the increasingly hostile environment in the region. Although the Middle East has always been a tumultuous area to navigate, the leaders of the West have been noncommittal and often contradictory.

The outcomes of the recent revolutions are extremely important for the United States' interests and its national security. However, two main problems exist within the decision-making process for United States' involvement in the region: First, there exists a lack of understanding of the foundational ideologies playing major roles in the region, and the threat that those ideologies create for Western civilization; Second, there is a lack of morale within Western nations to involve themselves in another protracted war, especially in the endless chasm of Middle Eastern affairs. These two problems play major roles in the conflicting reactions of the United States to Middle Eastern events.

Bradley provides an astute and well-developed analysis of the Arab Spring in respect to its support by western nations and its potential outcomes. The principal theme of his writing is that the West is involving itself in some risky business, as western governments do not fully understand the forces in play in the Middle East. In Libya, for example, he suggests that NATO took sides in a civil war rather than determine which

side of the conflict was fighting for true order and equal rights. Bradley asserts that the United States and other western nations that supported NATO in its attack and support of the Libyan rebels acted prematurely, aiding “not only unruly tribal gangs but also countless Islamist extremists” (cited in Hastings, para. 10). Throughout the Middle East, the most likely beneficiaries of turmoil are Islamist factions that are beginning to rise up and take majority seats in democratic elections. These emerging regimes are proving to be quite unfriendly towards the West.

In the *American Conservative*, Ted Carpenter (2012) stresses that although the USA had hoped to create a “pro-Western bastion” (para. 2) within Iraq following Saddam’s rule, this mission has clearly failed. As the United States attempts to save face and quickly withdraw its troops, it is laying the groundwork for Iranian influence to move in and re-orient this “quasi-democratic state” (para. 2) under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. In fact, Carpenter argues that in a U.S.-Iranian conflict, Iraq would be more likely to side with its “co-religionists in Tehran” (para. 17) than the United States. The story is similar in Afghanistan, where the Taliban are still a significant force, and President Hamid Karzai continues to lead a “corrupt and ineffectual” government (Carpenter, para. 3).

Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies astutely predicts that although there have been high hopes for democracy in this area, "none of these countries are going to rapidly become us" (cited in Smith, 2011, para. 20). Cordesman points out the foundational differences between the populations of the Middle East and those of Western nations that many fail to identify.

While many applaud the efforts of the people involved in the Arab Spring, the people have yet to accomplish their proposed goal. Cited in an article by Max Hastings in *Sunday Times*, Bradley asserts that the Arab spring is "a dismal failure" (para. 14). With strong libertarian tones, he prescribes that the United States must fully move out of the region and allow the nations to determine their futures, viewing the situation as lose-lose for the United States. However, the U.S. interest in the region is undeniable, be it economic investments and dependence, or allegiance to allies we have long supported. Bradley's analysis prescribes that the United States move out of the region in order to protect the lives of Americans, as well as to preserve the emaciated U.S. purse. Yet Bradley does not consider the long-term disadvantage of pulling all U.S. influence from the region (Hastings, 2012).

Bar makes another astute prediction concerning nuclear proliferation, a growing concern in the capricious region. He relays, "It is unrealistic to believe that the countries of the Middle East may forgo acquisition of their own nuclear weapons in return for American-extended assurances, particularly when the confidence in American support has been so drastically shaken by the abandoning of its erstwhile allies in Tunisia and Egypt" (Bar, 2011, para. 18). This is yet another example of the threats to the West associated with a radicalized Middle East.

The U.S. Role in the Arab Spring

In his novel *Unholy Alliance*, David Horowitz outlines the importance of the USA in international affairs:

... if the United States did not exist, the Communist empire would still be standing, the Taliban would rule Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein would be in

power, and the world would be a place of infinitely greater cruelty, injustice, and tragedy than the world that confronts us today. (2004, 244)

What role should the United States take in the Arab Spring? Writing for the *Ripon Forum*, Lorne Craner (2011) maintains that "America can't implant democracy, but to ensure we are on the right side of history, we should responsibly do everything possible to catalyze it" (para. 28). What Craner identifies here is the misguided philosophy that democracy is inherently good and moral. What many in the United States, as well as other western nations fail to understand is that democracy as a form of government is only moral and good when accompanied with presuppositions based on the self-evident truths emulated in the United States Constitution. Nations that have based their laws largely on Judeo-Christian values are able to maintain a constitutional republic with democratic tendencies. Even these nations, however, are not purely democratic (Craner, 2011).

Thus far, western nations have purported inconsistent philosophies and strategies for aiding the situation in the Middle East. Murray is critical of the western nations, specifically the United Kingdom, for abetting the rebellious Arab populations, while "there is no desire whatsoever for nation-building," noting as well that "money is in short supply. But no one seems to have the financial commitment or political will to see through even nation-influencing" (2011, para. 17).

There is little or no consensus on what position the United States should take concerning the Arab Spring. In April of 2011, for example, a series of Capitol Hill conferences were convened by the Middle East Policy Council. Analysts included Thomas Mattair (Executive Director, Middle East Policy Council), Anthony H.

Cordesman (Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies), Barak Barfi (Research Fellow, New America Foundation), Bassam Haddad (Director, Middle East Studies Program, George Mason University), and others. The information this panel relayed was extremely broad, focusing on specific countries in upheaval, as well as causes for the revolutions and prescriptive U.S. policies. While the panel members did not assert severely contradictory information, their analysis of what stance the United States should take concerning each country was very different. Some held that the United States needs to pull out and allow nations to determine their own futures. Others argued that the USA has a duty to set up native political teams in order to influence the developing governments (Cordesman, 2011).

Regardless of their differences, the panelists agreed, for the most part, that the actions taken by western nations and NATO did not accomplish the goals set forth by western administrations. During the last question and answer segment, Mr. Barfi was asked about changes in Iranian influence in the Middle East. He first clarified that there is less of an "increase in Iranian influence" and more of a "reduction in resistance to Iran" (cited in Cordesman, 2011, para. 95). He went on to explain that this reduction in resistance strengthens its relationships with clients in the Middle East, especially terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. He affirmed that Hosni Mubarak was:

... an anti-Iranian pillar ... with Mubarak now gone, the Saudi Arabians stand alone. And the Saudi Arabians don't like to lead policy initiatives in the region... So that's where I see Iran gaining. That said, it was gaining until what happened in Syria. Syria is very important to Iran ... if anything happens to Syria, that would

jeopardize the relationship and would be very damaging to Iran. (Cordesman, para. 96)

Shmuel Bar (2011) explains that the Obama administration has an agenda concerning the Middle East, just as every administration before him has also purported an agenda. However, Obama's administration holds that the USA is at a point of overstretch, and must "implement a drastic reduction in its strategic profile" (para. 3). While this position may not be entirely inaccurate, especially given the state of the U.S. economy, the actions taken by the Obama Administration in its relationship with nations in the Middle East has not been an effective platform. Bar describes Obama's strategy as "engagement with the Muslim world" (para. 6). Bar goes on to explain:

This policy of engagement includes not only moderates and mainstream Muslims, but also the Muslim Brotherhood, its affiliates, and "moderate" Taliban elements on the Sunni side and Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi proxies of Iran on the Shiite side. (para. 6)

The Obama administration assumes that these Muslim entities are not "irrevocably anti-American but angry over American and Western support of Israel and of autocratic and oppressive regimes in their countries" (Bar, para. 6). Obama has also mistakenly denied the connection of Islam and jihad terrorism. He has underestimated the strength of Islamic ideology in the region, and has thus misunderstood the situation in its entirety. Unfortunately, this mistake will not help increase U.S. influence in the area, but rather hurt U.S. interests in the Middle East.

Bar compares the U.S. reaction to the Arab Spring similarly to that of the Carter Administration in the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which deposed the Shah and led to the

takeover of Ayatollah Khomeini. Once again, U.S. allies in the Middle East are quickly coming to the conclusion that the United States is not a dependable ally, and that the “credibility of any American assurances, including strategic assurances against external threats from Iran ... [have] been dramatically degraded” (para. 8).

The Muslim Brotherhood recognizes the weakness of the United States and its shrinking influence in Middle Eastern affairs. Leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Mohamed Badie, have publicly demanded that the U.S. withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, characterizing it as “defeated and wounded,” and predicted the judgment of Allah and near-future demise of the United States. Barry Rubin characterizes such claims as a declaration of war by the Brotherhood on the United States, whose goals are becoming extremely similar to that of al-Qaeda (cited in Gaffney, 2011a, para 11.).

The reaction of the United States to the Middle Eastern drama is confusing and it is clear that the current administration must take decisive steps to defend its interests and influence in the region. It is impossible both financially and politically for the United States to dive into each unstable nation and rescue the people from their woes. As shown in the Libyan civil war, U.S. military involvement is not always the wisest choice for abetting peace. The most effective means the United States has to maintaining some type of meaningful influence in the Middle East will not be in placating to the emerging Islamic regimes; rather, it is to remain loyal to the last vessel of true democratic and republican ideals in the Middle East: Israel.

Historical US-Israeli Relations

Israel has been the closest and strongest political and military ally of the United States in the Middle East. U.S. support for Israel stretches back to early in Israel's modern

history. The United States had a hand in funding and providing information for Israel's nuclear program, beginning with the "atoms for peace" agreement between Israel and the Eisenhower administration (Correspondents of the New York Times, 1997, pp. 80-81).

The Yom Kippur War of 1973 provided an opportunity for the United States to plunge itself into diplomatic relations in the Middle East. It was obvious that the United States was primarily concerned with its own interests in the region; the oil embargo imposed on the United States by Arab oil producers at the beginning of the Yom Kippur War made the United States more aware of its need to protect its interests there. Henry Kissinger began the Middle East peace process, which was followed by the efforts of President Jimmy Carter and Cyrus Vance, his Secretary of State (Correspondents of the New York Times).

This role of mediator in the Middle East has been followed to some extent by each American president since this time, with some having more success in their endeavors than others. There have been some slivers of optimism, such as the peace brokered between Egypt's Anwar el-Sadat and Israel's Menachem Begin. However, this success is surrounded by many failed peace talks and summits between Israel and its Arab neighbors. However, the United States has continually played a vital role in working for some kind of stability in the region.

Although it remains officially unacknowledged, the existence of Israel's nuclear weapons has caused controversy. Israel has been pressured by the United States as well as other nations to sign the 1969 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Despite this pressure, Israel has refused, and instead has "tacitly agreed never to use nuclear weapons unless facing outright annihilation ... contingent on assurances that the United States would

come to Israel's aid ..." (Correspondents of the New York Times, 80). To its credit, Israel has only exercised its military muscle when needed in order to protect its interests and its citizens. Its foreign policy has been criticized by most of the world, yet Israel has maintained its sovereignty despite threats from its neighbors.

In light of Israel's many enemies, their refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty should not be seen as a threat. Israel's right to self-defense and sovereignty has never been an offensive threat to its neighbors. Rather, the Israelis have been the one dependent and compliant ally the United States has worked with since becoming involved in the Middle East.

The most recent threat to Israel from neighboring Egypt involves the 1979 Egyptian-Israel peace treaty. The treaty, brokered by the U.S at the Camp David Accords, "transformed Middle Eastern geopolitics and over the years has become a linchpin of regional stability" (Special reports, 2012, para. 2). Will the emerging fundamentalist Islamist government in Egypt continue to uphold the 1979 treaty?

Samuel Segev argues, "... this peace treaty has become meaningless.... Muslim Brotherhood leaders are repeatedly hinting that Israel should understand that things in Egypt have changed and that Israel should show more understanding of Palestinians' aspirations" (Segev, 2012, para. 12). Although the Muslim Brotherhood has declared that it will continue to uphold the peace treaty with Israel, the recently elected Parliament has taken various anti-Israeli actions, including a recent unanimous vote to expel the Israeli ambassador from the country (Special reports). Due to the current events in the Middle East, Israel may soon be the only true American ally in the region. If the current

administration desires to maintain influence in the Middle East, it must immediately change its attitude towards Israel.

The United States' Response to the Arab Spring

The economic and energy interests of the United States in the Middle East present a significant motive for maintaining influence and a military presence in the region.

However, there are countless factors at play concerning the United States' involvement in the Middle East. Many Americans would argue that the best U.S. response to the current upheaval in the region is to withdraw and allow the native people to fight it out among themselves. Judging by the decisions of the Obama administration, the American public may have to wait on a decided response from the President- the administration's decisions and rhetoric have not been consistent. However, even a lack of action in the region may have highly detrimental consequences for the United States.

The key at this moment in history is found in the countries where Iranian influence would be detrimental, yet the United States still has an opportunity to influence the political landscape, such as in Egypt. The Middle Eastern region will more than likely always be extremely unstable; thus is the nature of the beast. However, in order to protect its own interests in the region, the USA must work for stability in Egypt by supporting a secular, republican form of government other than the Muslim Brotherhood.

In Bar's (2011) article *America's Fading Middle East Influence*, he explains that following the Cold War, the United States became the dominant power in the Middle East, constantly maintaining the "status quo" with help from Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. However, with the recent revolutions in the Middle East, there has been a "decline of American projection of power in the region ..." (para. 2). He goes on to state:

... the U.S. is perceived as searching for the path of least resistance, lowering its strategic profile, and attempting to accommodate the de facto powers in the region. In all these areas, the United States is projecting an aversion to proactive action, disinclination to project power, and lack of resolve to support its allies. (para. 3)

America's allies realize that the United States is no longer reliable, and that their options for keeping afloat are quickly becoming limited to the only other hegemonic power in the region: Iran.

As recently as February 2012, the Obama administration continues to advocate a platform of negotiations and sanctions with Iran. Israel, legitimately concerned with its national security, prepares for the option to preemptively strike Iran due to nuclear threats from Iran's current administration. Nevertheless, the United States continues to take a soft stance regarding the immediate threat of Iranian aggression (Obama says Israel, 2012). Iran's desire for hegemony is not a ruse, and if the United States truly desires to protect its influence and interests in the Middle East, it must ensure Israel that it continues to be a staunch ally.

Unfortunately, the Obama administration has been at the forefront of confronting Israel's exercises of sovereignty. President Obama's relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been anything but supportive. President Obama:

insisted on an unprecedented Israeli settlement freeze, exceeding the demands at that time of the Palestinian Authority itself ... he offered "engagement" to Israel's Iranian and Syrian enemies, a vain policy that failed as the courted regimes

rebuffed the offer and brutalized their own pro-freedom demonstrators. (Feith, 2011, para. 8)

The United States under the Obama Administration has been a hurdle to Israel's exercise of sovereignty, and has been extremely friendly with Israel's unreliable neighbors.

Prior to the Arab Spring, the Obama administration already showed signs of sympathizing with Islamic fundamentalist groups. Obama gave a speech in Cairo Egypt in June 2009, and columnist David Goldman observed that by choosing such a location to speak on the topic of Islamic relations, "Obama [lent] credibility to the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and other advocates of political Islam who demand that Muslims be addressed globally and on religious terms" (Smith, 2009, para. 3). The Obama administration has not done well to ensure its friendships and support with its allies in the Middle East, such as the administration's support of Hosni Mubarak's removal from office. This support for the revolution in Egypt directly led to the takeover of the Muslim Brotherhood in this vital country. Whether or not the Obama administration intended for such a power shift will be left to political analysts and historians; yet regardless of intentions, the outcome of the administration's support speaks for itself.

Conclusion

As tensions in the Middle East intensified at the beginning of the Arab Spring, Iran did not take the same approach as the U.S. to the developing circumstances. Instead of backing away into a state of apathy, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei saw the situation as an opportunity to identify the solutions of the two problems plaguing the Islamic World. "According to Khamenei, 'unity among Muslim [states]' and 'the weakening of America'

are the two necessary steps that all Muslims must take to secure a ‘bright’ future for the umma or the worldwide Muslim nation” (Vatanka, 2011, 25).

Iran wasted no time in voicing its support for the Muslim Brotherhood when it began to see the changing political scene in Egypt. It set its sights on reestablishing a relationship with a country it has not associated with since 1980 (Vatanka, 35). Iran provided “ideological and financial assistance to Islamist movements,” including the Muslim Brotherhood (Choksy, 2011, 73). He further explains that “Iran covertly provides the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt with millions of dollars for political and religious endeavors ... Iran directs resources through the Brotherhood to increase radicalism among poor and middle-class Egyptians” (Choksy, 74).

In order to aid stability and maintain an influential foothold in the Middle East, it is imperative that the United States stand with Israel. Instead of placating radical Islamists who aspire to America’s demise, the United States must work to strengthen Israel if it desires to remain an active player in the region. The Obama administration, however, has been very lax in its relationship with Israel. The impending threat is succinctly summarized in an article by Jack Kelly, writer for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*:

Against all evidence, President Jimmy Carter in 1970 told himself the mullahs in Iran were moderate reformers. Against even more evidence, Mr. Obama regards the Muslim Brotherhood pretty much the same way. We're paying still a heavy price for Mr. Carter's egregious misjudgment. A greater miscalculation, with more profound consequences, looms. (Kelly, 2012, para. 17)

Unless major adjustments are made to the policies of the Obama administration, the United States may witness a sudden shift towards widespread regional government-condoned Islamic radicalism in the Middle East. The United States must learn from the lessons of history to better protect itself and its interests in the midst of the Arab Spring.

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