



The Arab Revolution

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The Great Arab Revolt of 2011 has moved swiftly from the peaceful overthrow of autocrats in the nation-states of Tunisia and Egypt to brutal repression in the tribal societies of Libya, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen.

Meanwhile, the wired youth bulge of the Middle East that brought change is dissipating into an impotent diaspora while the organized interests of the old regimes and the once-suppressed Islamists charge ahead to power. This section examines the revolt, the reaction and the power struggles in its aftermath.



America cannot go on riding the tiger forever in the Middle East. We cannot expect to have “pro-American” forces in power in the Middle East when the publics don’t like our policies. We cannot continue our endless interventions—out of fear that some states might emerge as anti-American. The world is sick of such meddling. We have to deal with the causes of why populations have become anti-American. And all this comes in the context of the rise of new powers with their own interests and desire for clout in what they see as a new, emerging, multipolar global order. The costs are rising on our old patterns of imposing Pax Americana.



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How to Jump-Start the Post-Revolutionary Era in Egypt

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CAIRO — As I was leaving Cairo after Hosni Mubarak stepped down, I asked Esraa, a young woman who was one of the leaders of the revolution, “what was your objective?” She said, “taghier al nezam”—a change of the system. The Egyptians brought down the head of the system, but not yet the system itself. That is the challenge now. The Egyptian revolution, like that in Tunisia, represents a unique model for change in the Middle East. Because of history and traditions, these societies are not fragmented by tribal or sectarian conflicts. Despite differences of people’s faith or even the occasional collisions between them, Egypt is united. It is not so much in the nationalist way as we have understood it in modern times, but in a civilizational way as “Umm al-Donia,” meaning Egypt is “the mother of the cosmos.”

In contrast, the second model for revolutions is that of Yemen, Libya and others in the making. In these cases, unfortunately, tribal and sectarian conflicts may lead to

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chaos and civil war, ultimately dragging the Middle East backward into conflict and fanaticism, not forward.

To avoid this outcome, the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia cannot be allowed to fail. Egypt is the key. With 85 million people, it is the largest country in the Middle East and the heart of the Arab world. Making sure Egypt succeeds is essential for the stability of world's energy supply as well as for peace in the region. The West in particular must show its support for these peaceful uprisings for democracy, the reason that was claimed to have been behind the war in Iraq.

What can be done at this time? From my own involvement as an instigator of change for over two decades and as a negotiator with the youth and government leaders during the Egyptian revolution, I know what the youth want the most—a new future, different from what they had in the past, where education and development give them an opportunity in life. The so-called “children of Facebook” that fomented the revolution know that Egypt was once ahead of South Korea in its level of science and education. They know that in the 30 years Mubarak sat in his palace and Egypt deteriorated, China has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty, sent astronauts into space, built glittering megacities and hi-speed trains and brought its urban students up to world standards. They ask why Egypt can't do the same thing.

Of course, while this is the kind of change that ultimately matters, it will take decades to get there. That is why the first priority now is offering a “candle of hope” that can light the path forward.

I see a timely opportunity. While the Egyptians themselves must be the builders of the new nation, they need some help in rebuilding sustainable institutions. The place to start is with the first command of the Quran—READ. For Egypt today that means a “Renaissance in Education and Development.” An Egypt Fund for READ should be established through a global partnership of private and government organizations.

This non-political fund should be directed by a board of trustees from renowned Egyptians and world leaders in cooperation with the Egyptian government, and be solely for the purpose of establishing a new education system and charting a capacity-building strategy for economic development.

The aim of this fund would be complete reform of education from K-12 to the university level to the establishment of research and development centers needed to build up Egypt's infrastructure and the industrial complex.

Illiteracy is a major barrier for development and for fostering democracy. I would suggest that READ focuses on managing and supporting, in a world class style, three prototype and major projects—eradication of illiteracy, establishment of science schools for the gifted, and building centers of excellence for R&D.

At the outset, such an effort would need to be seeded with \$1 billion, along with a \$1 billion initial endowment to be drawn from private and government sources. Over the coming years, further funds beyond this initial seeding could come from a consortium of nations and be deployed through the World Bank, the Arab Bank and the Islamic Development Fund.

Given that nearly half of Egypt's population is under 30 years of age, the return on investment of knowledge-based economic development for a new Middle East would dwarf the results of having spent trillions on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The psychological influence of launching such a fund at this moment cannot be underestimated. Like Tunisia, Egypt today is in a "fluid state" in which a whole range of interest groups, from the remnants of the old regime to political and religious fanatics are contending for the direction of Egypt's future. By showing that effective institutions can be built successfully, the READ project would be a hopeful compass that can point Egypt in the right direction.

In Egypt, every family is suffering financially and emotionally from the deteriorated education system of Mubarak's regime. What families want most of all is to secure a good education for their children and work for a better future of the country. Tangible and immediate progress on this front will be critical to preventing Egypt from sliding backward to its old ways.

In reality, there is no other solution for Egypt's long-term future than better education and development. Egypt does not possess rich natural resources. Its agricultural area is relatively small—less than 10% of the total land. Its growth now relies on tourism, Suez Canal tariffs and foreign investment. Yet, according to the United Nations, Egypt's population will grow to reach 114 million before it stabilizes in the year 2065.

In history, recurrences do occur. If Egyptians are ready to take advantage of this unique moment, it can recover the greatness which made it a cradle of civilization and the intellectual and industrial center of the Arab world.

It is in the best interests of everyone—the Chinese, the Americans, the Europeans, the other Arab states—who want long term stability in the Middle East that the peaceful democratic revolutions in Egypt and elsewhere succeed. Revolutions seeking to create a new order are at most risk in their infancy. If we don't act now when the window is open, the consequence of not rapidly consolidating the benefits of change will haunt the Middle East for decades to come.

Time is of the essence!



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