



The Potomac Institute for Policy Studies,
Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies

The New Middle East: Quo Vadis?

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Special Seminar

The New Middle East: Quo Vadis?

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Potomac Institute for Policy Studies

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Director, Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies

Panelists:

Brig. Gen. David G. Reist, USMC (Ret.)

Senior Research Fellow, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies

Dr. Josef Olmert

Adjunct Professor, American University's School of International Service; former Israeli government senior official

Prof. Fariborz (Fred) Mokhtari

Faculty – Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University

Dr. Michael Rubin

Resident Scholar – American Enterprise Institute; Lecturer – Johns Hopkins University

Prof. Yonah Alexander: *Director, Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies*

I would like to welcome our very distinguished speakers. General David Reist is a Senior Research Fellow at the Potomac Institute. Dr. Josef Olmert next to him is currently an adjunct professor at American University's School of International Service. Dr. Fariborz (Fred) Mokhtari is a faculty member at the National Defense University. Dr. Michael Rubin is a resident scholar at American Enterprise Institute here and is also teaching at Johns Hopkins. Also, I would like to welcome our friends and colleagues from the Potomac Institute, other academic institutions, US government officials, Congressional staff, diplomats, and the press.

Since I just returned from a fact-finding trip to Morocco and am planning to visit both Tunisia and Algeria at another opportunity, I wish to share with you some of my preliminary impressions on the new Middle East in order to provide a broader context for our panel discussion.

A famous Arab folklore tale relates that a poor man finding a date in the desert said to it: "Where should I go to eat you in peace?"

Welcome to the Middle East! Indeed, contemporary history of the region (including North Africa – also known as the Maghreb) is characterized by perpetual threats to peace with continuing implications to global security concerns. The unprecedented unfolding popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere in the region are only the latest manifestations of instability succumbing to potential violence and even internal and external wars.

The question arises whether the initial inspiring bloodless "Jasmine Revolution" and the Egypt Revolution that resulted from political, social, and economic dislocations can ultimately serve as a means of encouraging Arab leadership to re-define fundamentally their regimes' alignment with the diverse needs of their citizens while externally seeking opportunities to reduce conflict and cynical interactions with their and thereby contribute to the cause of peace with justice in the Middle East and North Africa region.

It is also instructive for US policymakers to move beyond accumulating predictions about "who's next" to building long-term stability for US interests in the region. This is the ultimate lesson of the recent months, that crisis management inherently leaves a vacuum because of the necessary focus on the immediate and the symptomatic, diverting attention and resources from the longer term investments and relationships that address the causes of dislocation, marginalization, and conflict.

Although it may be both premature and presumptuous to offer a definite roadmap as to how US policy can "reset" in the coming months in light of events in the region, some lessons however seem to be emerging from the current crises in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen. There are three key areas for effective international engagement, particularly American and European, which are particularly critical vis-à-vis North Africa as significant strategic areas:

First, the need for a more measured, deliberate, and coordinated economic development and growth strategy linking the EU, US, and Maghreb countries that promotes specific markers in

integrated economic growth, social reform, and political participation in each country in the region, to keep the region's growing population of youth off the road to alienation, desperation, emigration, and susceptible to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) or other operations other extremists pied pipers. While there has been and continues to be a great deal of discussion and pilot programs in this regard, particularly from the EU, a more concerted effort is called for, including the thorny issue of economic migration.

Second, there are two main vectors in the need for greater regional cooperation: to spur economic growth and meet the security threat posed by AQIM or other extremists. It is long past the time for the Maghreb countries to work together and achieve greater economic integration through the realization of a common economic market, unrestricted capital and labor movement, protection of investments and intellectual property, and mutual and contemporary exchanges of professionals, expertise, technology, and market development. Similarly, the vital need for regional cooperation on security issues such as illegal immigration, terrorism, trafficking, and halting the flow of narcotics is self-evident.

And third, countries in the region must be nudged and pressured to resolve border and other differences that inhibit "good neighbor" cooperation. This should begin with a solid international effort to end the decades-old Western Sahara conflict, a running sore between Morocco and Algeria that encourages radicalization and prevents regional cooperation in all areas. The UN process for a negotiated political solution that provides broad autonomy within Moroccan sovereignty has been recognized as the substantial basis for providing self-determination to the people of Western Sahara. It should be strongly supported.

In hindsight, the failure to balance real political participation by civil society and broad-based economic opportunity has made countries in the region vulnerable to public unrest and possible disorder. Now, the challenge is to restore order built on long term strategy incorporation during this time of transition that give the authorities and citizens the breathing space to hold new elections, establish accountable governing structures, and build a new social framework for economic growth and personal freedoms. Finally, as a part of the transition, national dialogues that have as their basis the restoration of trust between government and citizens should not be overlooked.

The United States and Europe can play an important role in ensuring that this internal process between the citizens of the Maghreb countries and their evolving government moves forward as smoothly as possible. It is critical for the international community to oppose attempts by external forces to intervene in each country's resolution process and also to ensure that domestic extremists do not obstruct the reconstitution of political and public institutions in the countries undergoing change. Instability provides openings to religious and political extremists or terrorist organizations that are always eager to take advantage of any breakdown in law and order.

The good news is that regime opponents throughout the region participating in the demonstrations have a precise cause and purpose – to get rid of the corrupt, ineffective governments, access jobs and social benefits, and build transparent, responsive, and pragmatic government institutions. So far, the leadership as it is emerging represents the young,

intellectual, professional, political, and social leaders committed to a broad range of human development. Their commitment and goals need no tinkering from external political or ideological forces.

In sum, North Africa critically matters to the United States, Europe, and elsewhere. The current demand for regime change represents a clear sign that much must be done to restore credibility between citizens and governments. It is the task of the international community to nurture peaceful and constructive national dialogues that will reduce obstacles to freedom and progress and greatly enhance the future of the people and the broader region.

BG David Reist (USMC-Ret.): *Senior Research Fellow, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies*

Professor Alexander, thank you for that kind introduction and it is a pleasure to participate with this distinguished panel on this vital topic.

First, it was necessary for me to look up “Quo Vadis.” The origin comes from the Bible as Peter asks Jesus “Quo Vadis” – “Whither goes thou” or “where are you going?” Jesus responded, “I am going to Rome to be crucified again” and this prompts Peter to gain the courage to continue his ministry.

I don’t know where the Middle East is going. I’m not sure where DC is going. The following conversation I believe rings true – it is by Lewis Carroll from *Alice in Wonderland*:

Alice says to the Cat, “Would you tell me please which way I ought to go from here?” “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to”, said the Cat. “I don’t much care” said Alice. “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go” said the Cat. “... So long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation. “Oh, you’re sure to do that” said the Cat “If you only walk long enough.”

The world is complex, and the Middle East may be the jewel of complexity. If you imagine the Middle East as a Rubik’s cube, it may begin to help. First, everyone sees a different image based on which side they are looking at. I see red, some of you see blue, green, yellow, white, or orange – we are all looking at the same cube but viewing it through a different lens – from a different side. Now some know how to get this Rubik’s cube back to the same colors on all sides – make it right so to speak, the way it came in the package. There is a formula for making the Rubik’s cube right – it is pure math. But to make the Middle East “Right” – I’m not aware of any formula.

There has been much discussion on what the United States can and should do. Some believe the US is the beacon of democratic ideals and she should export ideals and shape this situation. Others believe the US should not interfere and it is the choice of the people of any country to determine THEIR future. The ideal from the United States does espouse free choice, BUT, is the United States (and other countries) willing to accept the choices made? Imagine you have a

daughter and you feel you have instilled in her the correct ideals and you believe she has the capacity to make the right choices. She is about to go out on a “date” with a young man, one you do not approve of. What do you do, trust her to make the right choice? When you see her going down a road that you know (or feel) will harm her, do you volunteer to accompany them on that date? I wouldn’t mind that as a parent, but my daughter might. Using a more serious example – and a historic one – let’s look at how Athens handled the situation with the Island of Melos in 416 BC. Melos was an Island located off Sparta (the enemy of Athens) and it was aligned with Sparta. The Athenians wanted to occupy Melos in order to gain leverage against the Spartan’s.

As Thucydides writes in the “History of the Peloponnesian War” the Athenians in a frank and unpretentious manner offer the Melian’s an ultimatum: surrender and pay tribute to Athens or be destroyed. The Melian’s argue that they are a neutral country and not an enemy, so Athens need not crush them. The Athenians counter that if they accept Melos’s neutrality and independence, they would appear weak. The Melian’s argue that an invasion will alarm the other Greek neutral states, who will become hostile to Athens for fear of being invaded themselves. Thucydides describes that it is completely indicative of the principle problem with democratic states – the tyranny of the mob – that the Athenian assembly would favor such a move, which strategically cannot be said to have been a great benefit. Simply said another way, can a more powerful country do something simply because they can and what are the implications?

No one doubts that most people in the world probably just want the basics – food, water, shelter – Maslow’s hierarchy. After gaining the basics, they will want more, and especially when they know what others possess. This translates today in rich vs poor and the power of social dynamics (facebook, twitter) in pointing this out very quickly.

Know one thing for sure – when a vacuum exists, if not filled with positive leadership or goodness, evil will creep in, and quickly. Although much is currently discussed about governance and ideals, let’s not lose sight that miscreants will fill the void. Also, never forget that capitalists will act to make money in the midst of this chaos, and not always in a positive way. “Follow the money” is an old adage that always applies. On this point, it only takes a few seconds for things to go astray but so much longer to get them right.

My last thought speaks at complexity of this situation and the role the Muslim faith plays in this. I’m not sure. I, like you, have met many noble Christians & Muslims around the world – along with men & women of many other faiths. On the other side of that coin we’ve all met men that leave much to be desired – all faiths. We can champion that our faith is the more righteous and their faith has been hijacked – or hijacked a group of people --, but I’m reminded of the words spoken by Abraham Lincoln when he was asked whether God was on his side during the tortuous times of the Civil War. He responded “My concern is not whether God is on our side, my greatest concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right.”

Dr. Josef Olmert: *Adjunct Professor, American University's School of International Service; former Israeli government senior official*

We discuss the Middle East crisis, in light of the momentous events in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as in other countries, and my first point is to ask what Middle East? My answer to this question, as well as my other points reflect an Israeli perspective of the storm that we all are witnessing, which I believe, is nearing the end of the beginning, definitely not the beginning of the end.

I am not sure that readers of the press in this country or in other Western countries could have even expected anything like that, if they really followed what was given to them by the press. The vast majority of coverage on the Middle East, has been on the Israeli-Palestinian situation, as if this is the one and only big issue in that troubled region of the world and the key to understanding all its other problems.

This is obviously an important issue, and, as an Israeli I would like to see it resolved, and the sooner the better. I also understand, that the solution should be predicated on the two states option. That said, I fail to see how this question was the trigger to the unfolding situation in so many countries. The current mayhem has nothing to do with all that. It has to do with many other causes, and they all can be found in the UN reports on the state of human development in the Arab world, written by a group of distinguished Arab scholars, and published since 2003.

These reports portray a depressing picture of poverty, neglect, deprivation, corruption and oppression. The last published report, in 2009, specifically made it clear that the situation is getting worse, rather than showing signs of improvement. The uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, the riots in Jordan, Yemen, Algeria and Bahrain, all were focused on the deeply entrenched grievances of disenfranchised citizens, mainly young, protesting the state of affairs described in the UN reports. Some of these countries have never been directly involved in any of the Arab-Israeli wars, and altogether it is undeniably true, that no Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli collision of the last two decades has provoked a popular reaction, even remotely similar in its ferocity, to the current tidal wave.

Yet as if by Pavlovian reflex, the reactions of many that failed to predict the eruption, still revolve around the alleged centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the focal point of Middle East politics and the explanation of the crisis. Take, for example, the reaction of the retiring national security advisor of the Obama administration, General Jim Jones. Appearing in a conference in Israel, he stated that the Israeli-Palestinian situation has been and still is the real, big issue of the current Middle East.

Clearly, anti-Israel sentiments are rife in most of the Arab states, perhaps in all, including, of course, Egypt and Jordan, the two Arab states which have peace treaties with Israel. It may be a likely result of the current crisis, that the leaderships of these two countries will try to win favor with some of the opposition groups, by lowering the profile of the connection with Israel. That will be deplorable and with no relevance to the real predicament of many of their citizens, but not out of context with the reactions in these countries in the past, when internal tensions seemed to pose a challenge to the stability of the regimes.

The Jordanian regime may be shaken, particularly with the renewed tension between Jordanians and Palestinians, which were much on display recently, but the Hashemite kingdom is here to stay, so we need not be too worried about a sudden, negative change of attitude towards the peace treaty with Israel. I am optimistic about the ability of King Abdallah to internalize the voices of protest, and make the necessary adjustments. He will enable some of his cronies to make the ritualistic anti-Israel statements, but he will be reluctant to break the formal diplomatic relations with Israel, and will not cut the discreet, behind the scenes intelligence-security collaboration with Israel. To do that, will amount to scoring a decisive own goal..., the king will not do that, and will follow the playbook of his late father, King Hussein. The tacit, un-declared Israeli guarantee to the independence and territorial integrity of Jordan, as well as the interests of the latter, will make sure that the relationships will survive the crisis.

The situation in Egypt is uppermost on the minds of the Israeli people. After 3 decades of cold peace, the big majority of the Israeli public believes that even a cold peace is much preferred over a good war. The Israeli outlook of the current Egyptian situation is, therefore, heavily, though not exclusively determined by the fear of war with Egypt, a prospect seemed totally inconceivable just few short weeks ago. Let me make it as clear as possible, that most Israelis view with admiration the Egyptian popular struggle for freedom. There can be no doubt about that. Let me mention, that two prominent Israelis, the first, Nathan Sharanski, the famous freedom fighter, and current head of the World Zionist Organization, and Prime Minister Netanyahu, relentlessly argued that real democratization in the Arab world will be the key to real peace in the Middle East. In fact, it is a well-known fact, that President George W. Bush, who actively propagated and acted for democratization in the Middle East, was greatly influenced by Sharanski. Still many Israelis are expressing grave concerns, even deep fears, that the new Egypt will change course, and future relationships between the two countries may take a turn to the worse, possibly leading all the way to a war.

Israeli fears are something that needs to be analyzed. Yes, Israelis militarily powerful, and economically prosperous. In the last quarter of 2010, the Israeli economy grew by 7.8%!the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) continue to be a formidable and deterring military force, and still Israelis tend to view with alarm regional and international developments, and they react so, for what I can define as a Jewish syndrome, the fear of being besieged and isolated. The Israelis are the one nation that follows meticulously Santayana's famous line, that "those who forget the past are doomed to relive it." The collective historic legacy of the Jews is one of deep suspicion towards the non-Jewish world. It is clearly an exaggerated picture of the world, but one which still has strong grip on many Israelis. The Iranian nuclear threat, the worldwide campaign of boycott, divestment, sanctions against Israel and the constant UN votes against it, all combine to cement and perpetuate this sentiment

The Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty has played a very significant role in terms of reducing Israel's sense of isolation. The ability to cross the border to Sinai, formerly a zone of hostilities and hatred, seemed to Israelis as a realization of a dream. It may seem trivial to those in Europe and North America, who can cross borders at will, but definitely almost miraculous to the Israeli public. It is against this background, that we need to view Israeli concerns regarding the changes in Egypt.

I subscribe to the view that Egypt is not going to become another Iran. I trust that the Egyptian army will continue to play a decisive role in Egyptian politics and foreign policy. In fact, I anticipate that its role will generally conform to that played by the Turkish army, according to the Kemalist constitution, at least until recently. That means that the military will take it upon itself to prevent Egypt from becoming a theocracy, and it also means that it will maintain and protect Egypt's international obligations, chief among them the peace treaty with Israel. Here is also a challenge to the Obama administration, which handled the crisis in tandem with the Egyptian military if we are to believe a growing body of press reports. The Israelis will expect the US to exert its influence with the Egyptian military, and the odds are that it will have a positive and calming effect, surely in the short term.

However, we do not deal here with a zero sum game, of full war or an ideal peace. Egypt is going to be more democratic, not as democratic as western democracies are, but democratic enough to allow political forces, which are sworn enemies of the peace treaty, to play a part in politics, and that brings me to the Muslim Brotherhood factor.

During the modern history of Egypt, there were political movements which, on occasions, left their mark on its political history: the Wafd party, Misr al-Fatat, the Arab Socialist Union under Nasir as well as the Mubarak regimes' National Democratic Party. Yet none of them has endured for more than some time, and they have vanished in the thin air without leaving a trace; not so the Muslim Brotherhood. This is the one and only political movement, which has survived 80 years of on-going repression by successive governments in Egypt. During all these years, the Brotherhood maintained its self-styled role of being in the vanguard of the jihad against Zionism and Israel.

It may be too presumptuous to predict the results of the forthcoming Egyptian elections. It is not too risky though to predict, that fair and free elections will place the Brotherhood in a very important position in the political map. While in the West, we toy with words such as secular and believe that they are relevant to the Middle East situation, in reality, this is not so. Egypt is anything but a secular society. According to most recent polls, over 80% of the Egyptian people support the execution of converts from Islam to another religion, and the same amount support stoning to death adulterer women. These findings do not bode well, and they confirm the fears in Israel that the brotherhood will play an effective role in Egyptian politics, to the detriment of the relationships with Israel. So, while deterioration to war is not in the offing, a gradual decline in the relationships is definitely likely, and with it the risk, from Israel's perspective, that former levels of cooperation between the countries on security issues, for example, against Hamas in Gaza, will not survive the political pressures by the Brotherhood. Take another possible point of worry; the possibility that the new Egyptian government will allow the passage of Iranian warships in the Suez Canal.

With that in mind, I do not expect the Netanyahu government in Israel to take bold steps with regard to the stalled peace process in the Middle East. Caution is the order of the day in Israel, and who, in their right mind, can blame her for that?

Professor Fariborz (Fred) Mokhtari: *Faculty – Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University*

Thank you very much. I have two reasons for which to apologize. One is that I was stuck in the Metro underground, thus I arrived late. A train had been disabled, so although I had left early to get here early, the expression, “everything that could go wrong will go wrong,” came through this time. The second reason for apology is an Iranian custom. I apologize for addressing a group more knowledgeable than I. I must clarify that whatever I say is a reflection of my personal views, not those of the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, nor the National Defense University, nor the Pentagon, nor the U.S. Government. Finally, I am not a fan of the regime in Iran, or the regime in Egypt, or any regime anywhere in the Middle East, but I’ll compel to tell you the truth as I know it. I want to lay my cards on the table before I go on.

I have been told that I should give a brief presentation of ten minutes. so I am going to say a few things in bullet form, and hope that we can discuss them further during Q/A.

I like to point out that when we look at the news, or at least when I look at the news, it appears that everything is about us, the United States. In reality that is not the case. It might be a shock to some of us, but it is not all about us. What happens in other places, in most cases, is not really about us at all. We often, as General Reist just mentioned, are upset that people don’t see things the way we do. And of course, they are upset that we don’t see the obvious because it appears so clear to them. We often hear that it is the economy that is the problem and that economic development will save us from instability. I suggest to you that a nation’s economy is important, but dignity trumps all. People are willing to put up with poverty and a great deal of misery as long as they feel they have dignity, honor, and respect. The other way around, things do not work very well. The turmoil in Egypt as in some other places (I am pessimistic that the turmoil will end with Egypt), reflects a crisis of dignity, a crisis of honor, and a crisis of betrayal, much more than a crisis of the economy. We should have known from years back that the status quo was not sustainable, but we did not.

There were situations in many other countries that are not sustainable, and we would be wise to recognize that. I’ll give you an example. I attend track-II conferences as part of my job. I attended one several years ago. During one of the sessions an elderly, dignified gentleman from a state in the Persian Gulf, a retired foreign service officer said, “I am loyal to my government, and am a Sunni, but I worry because in the entire foreign office in my country, there is not a single Shia diplomat, nor is there one Shia officer In the entire military force or the police force.” Now we might blame the Iranians for conspiring, but I submit to you that in a state with a substantial Shia population in such a situation, all you need is a spark and it does not have to come from Iran at all. That situation is not sustainable. Now, what is even more interesting is that when I was flying home I had to stop in Frankfurt to change a plane. As I was waiting for my plane, a gentleman came and sat next to me. As it turned out he was an admiral coming from a bas in the Persian Gulf. I said, “Admiral I just heard this yesterday and I’ve got to tell you.” He listened very patiently and said, “We know. That is why we send our families home.” As a U.S. citizen, this bothers me a lot because we are investing so much of our political capital, our resources, and our reputation, in situations that are not sustainable.

I was invited to a seminar several weeks ago. It was organized by a great many noted personalities. If I mention names you would recognize them because you see them in newspapers every day. They were the people who have been promoting and enforcing sanctions on Iran. I was of course very pleased to be there. There were quite a number of Asian and European diplomats there as well. But the seminar gradually appeared to me as a festival of self-congratulation. The speakers were congratulating themselves on how great they were doing and how effective their undertaking was going to be. To be honest, this reminded me of a rather coarse Persian expression. I apologize, but I think I should translate it. The expression is “if you have not wet your bed, the night is young.” In other words, don’t be so pleased with yourself so early.

One thing clearly observed by the diplomats in attendance during those presentations, was the extraterritorial measures. The United States’ legislature is passing laws that are imposed on other governments, some of them our friends and allies. That is not a very nice thing to do in this day and age, and not gratifying if you are at the receiving end of the dictates. The gentleman that represented the government of France stated that France disagreed (with extraterritorial measures) in principle,... but had chosen to support the government of the United States on this issue. He was courageous to say what many other diplomats must have felt.

Let me give you a few more things to consider before I sit down. One of the things we have been very happy about recently is the computer virus that may have disrupted or delayed the nuclear program in Iran. But this sort of activity has consequences that will come to haunt. If we legitimize this sort of attack, it won’t be very long before many others, some of them state actors some of them non-state actors, some of them tiny state actors, will indulge in vandalism which is very hard to control. There was a time when war would require armies and equipment. But when we engage in this sort of attacks, a lot of people could get involved in sabotage without the need for having armies or weapons, or the sophistication of warfare.

A word on national sentiments. As you know there was a UN meeting in New York in October of 2010. One of the people in attendance was a person I don’t admire, Mr. Ahmadinejad, President of Iran. He does something interesting every time he comes to the United States. He invites about 100 people, among them scholars, to have dinner with him. I don’t know of any other head of government who does that. But he does, and he listens to his guests and answers questions. I wasn’t invited by the way, a colleague was. Ahmadinejad was asked, “Are you developing nuclear weapons?” He replied, “No we are not. Nuclear weapons are useless and immoral. Their only use is to kill people. It is against our religion.” Then he said ... and this is the key, “But the decision is ours!” Now that statement, whether you support Iran’s nuclear policy or not--that the decision is ours--is something that resonates with the Iranians. In a similar situation concerning Egypt or the United States, it would also resonate with the Egyptians; as it would with us in the United States. “The decision is ours,” implies that If you want to impose it from the outside the reaction is predictable.

In regards to issues of security, we often hear that the Middle East is hard to understand. I submit that it is hard to understand because we make it so. The issue of security, for instance, is a major concern for instability leads to problems that we have to go to settle. But the traditional view of being secure has been the security of some at the expense of the insecurity of others. Some of us

get together and feel that we will be secure if we have more planes, more tanks, bigger armies, and stronger economies, to keep the rest in check. We call that stability. Well, that is inherently unstable, because the people who are on the other side of the equation will do everything possible to change it. We talk about balance of power. We seek a balance of power, but a tilting balance, which is not sustainable. I submit that we should rethink these issues. At least we should think about security for all, an inclusive view of security, rather than security for some at the expense of insecurity for others. It won't be easy, but if you want a metaphor, consider the issue of trade. There was a time when people thought—some very smart people--that a nation would enrich itself through selling goods and hoarding precious metals. That was the age of mercantilism. Then we suddenly discovered that free trade enriches both sides, a win-win situation, allowing all to get rich. The same thing may apply to security and we ought to start thinking about it.

We often talk about diplomacy and we pretend that we are conducting diplomacy by not talking to our opponents. To pretend that we are conducting diplomacy by not talking to adversaries is not only useless, it is foolish. We can always talk to your friends. That is not a big deal. It is to your enemies that we ought to be talking, if diplomacy is to have a chance. To demand that the adversary frontloads its concessions before we even start talking is beyond belief, for it is neither negotiation, nor is it diplomacy.

We, in the United States have wonderful, positive characteristics. But we are also terribly impatient. When I talk to my students, especially my undergraduate students, I refer to this as the “soda-machine mentality.” I explain that we go to a soda machine, insert a coin, push a button, a soda can drop down, and we have immediate gratification. By God, if that soda doesn't fall down through that hole, we get mad, kick the machine, tilt it, and if that doesn't work we push it or pull it off the wall. We don't have the patience that it takes to deal with some difficult international issues.

There are two philosophical views for looking at things. Professor Robert Nozick has written about this. He proposes that one way of looking at things as they are, is a snapshot view. You look at things and decide whether you like the arrangement as is, and if you don't, you may decide to rearrange things. The other way of looking at things is a chain-link view. From that perspective, things are arranged the way they are now, because certain events and influences in the past have made them so. Thus we see things quite differently, depending on the way we comprehend the arrangement.

We often talk about governments as if we were talking about nations. That is a terrible mistake, and we make it often. We talk about Iran and what we really mean is the 500 clerics in power. We talk about Egypt, but rather than thinking about the 70 million Egyptians, we think about the regime in power, because that is all we want to see. It is, after all, a lot easier to talk to a sheik or a president for life to secure a concession than it is to think about the people's interests and address the national interests. The national interests that are presented by the leaders are often not national. Those are frequently their preferences that are portrayed as national interests. You may recall that on the 13th of January of this year, the national interest of Tunisia, as presented to us, was quite different from the national interest that was presented to us the following day on

the 14th after the gentleman, President Ben Ali of Tunisia, had flown to Saudi Arabia. Thank you.

Dr. Michael Rubin: Resident Scholar – American Enterprise Institute; Lecturer – Johns Hopkins University

The uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia are accountability revolutions. They present a real opportunity for reform, although they also might spawn an Alexander Kerensky or Mehdi Bazargan moment and usher in far more regressive movements, a scenario that becomes more likely if the White House decides not to use what little leverage it has to determine what comes next.

Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak's fall is the end of the beginning rather than the beginning of the end. During Iran's Islamic Revolution, there were over nine months between Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's return and the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran. Those nine months were turbulent. Khomeini used a series of events, real and contrived to purge his broad-based revolutionary coalition of its most liberal and secular elements. Indeed, the seizure of the American Embassy had as much to do with internal Iranian politics as it did with animosity toward the United States.

The idea that Arab autocracies make the best American partners is false. Despite conventional wisdom, they never brought stability. During the Cold War, the region saw repeated war, revolution, and terrorism. While some today may lament Mubarak's fall, tying American security to octogenarian dictators should never be a long-term strategy.

The shock of Ben Ali and Mubarak's departure should lead American policymakers to be proactive in other transitions. Certainly the White House should demand real rather than rhetorical reform in the region's other authoritarian countries, and President Obama should certainly be proactive in contingency planning in countries led by other aging autocrats. Ensuring a smooth transfer of power in the Sultanate of Oman should be a priority. Strategically located on the Strait of Hormuz, Oman is led by the aging Sultan Qaboos who, because of his homosexuality, has produced no offspring. Should Oman switch its strategic orientation, it could fundamentally alter the American strategic footprint.

Iran presents another succession challenge especially should it possess nuclear weapons. A handpicked, elite and loyal unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) would likely maintain command-and-control over any Iranian nuclear arsenal. When political scientists say that deterring a nuclear Iran is possible, they base their opinion partly in an assumption that regimes mature when they recognize the responsibility inherent in being a nuclear power. Both Pakistan and India strengthened their command-and-control and doctrine for use of nuclear weapons following the 1998 Kargil crisis. In Iran, however, selection of a new Supreme Leader might lead to a cycle of radicalization rather than moderation. In theory, when the Supreme Leader dies, the 86-man Assembly of Experts chooses his successor. In reality, however, regime elites reach a consensus before submitting their choice to the clerical body for its rubberstamp.

If Iran has nuclear weapons, then it stands to reason that the radical and ideological Revolutionary Guards unit controlling that arsenal will have veto power over any successor. This creates a cycle of radicalization in which the Supreme Leader selects the most ideological pure Guardsmen who in turn select the new Supreme Leader.

As the United States considers the new Middle East, it must also recognize the proxy wars for influence currently underway. Hezbollah's triumph in Lebanon after Saudi Arabia abandoned its earlier support for the March 14 movement was a blow to American influence. Turkey and Iran now compete for mastery over in the Arab Middle East. That many American officials remain blind to Iranian and Turkish ambitions is worrisome and represents a willful refusal to recognize reality. For example, many Americans trumpet the Turkish model for Egypt to define an ideal post-Mubarak regime. They fail to recognize that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is simultaneously pursuing a Hezbollah model. Too often, Americans and their allies in Israel see Turkey's behavior as reactive. They are wrong. Turkey's actions are proactive. Hours before Erdoğan 'spontaneously' erupted at Nobel Laureate Shimon Peres and stormed off the stage at Davos, the Turkish government ordered the Istanbul metro to remain open until 4 a.m. that day only. The extended hours enabled Erdoğan supporters, alerted by text message, to reach the Istanbul airport to greet their leader at 3 a.m. for a pro-Palestinian rally.

As American policymaker maneuver in the new Middle East they must also be wary that they operate with diminished credibility. Both Presidents Bush and Obama drew and violated redlines linking Iranian behavior with specific actions on more than two dozen occasions. This creates a dangerous environment of overconfidence among American adversaries who increasingly believe that the United States is a paper tiger. While many people say wars in the Middle East are caused by oil, and trendy academics say water shortages cause conflict, the reality is that overconfidence causes most wars. In the aftermath of the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, Hezbollah's secretary-general Hasan Nasrallah declared that if he had known how Israel was going to reach, he would never have launched his initial operation. Because he did not understand Israel's redlines, he sparked a war. The fact that Iran does not fully understand what America's real redlines are mean that we may find ourselves reacting to their violation in a way that will spark a war that neither side expects.

A Muslim Brotherhood-dominated regime in Egypt is perhaps the worst-case scenario the United States faces. But even if the uprisings bring liberal democracy, the American government should not assume that the result will be pro-American. Intellectual anti-Americanism has long dominated Middle Eastern liberalism. In Iran, for example, Jalal Al-e Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxification) dominated secularist circles for nearly two decades before Khomeini's Islamic Revolution. Nor should we expect a magical revival of the Middle Eastern economy. Social welfare dominates the discourse of both Arab and Persian politics. Seldom defined, this often reflects an assumption that the state should dominate the economy.

When the dust settles from the current upheaval, there will be time to consider lessons learned. Here, there is also danger. Many states may try to defuse anger with more proactive reforms. But it is possible that some regimes will learn the opposite lesson: That they need to crack down harder and more often. They may conclude that while Syria and Libya have both suffered

protests, that it is the freer, more Western-oriented regimes which fell. The White House should certainly have contingencies to address any regional allies which conclude more autocracy is needed, not less.

When addressing these various trends, it is important that Obama use his bully pulpit in the Oval Office to lead discussions and take decisions, rather than just observe and react. Diplomacy is like a football match. Obama is on the field whether he likes it or not. Neutrality is not an option; it is akin to standing still and refusing to block opponents—be they Iran, Libya, Turkey, or the Muslim Brotherhood. American leverage may be limited, but if Obama tries to exert it, he may just find he has more than he realizes.

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Professor Yonah Alexander serves as a Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies and Director of its International Center for Terrorism Studies as well as a member of the Board of Regents. Concurrently, he is Director of the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies and Co-Director of the Inter-University Center for Legal Studies. Both are consortia of universities and think tanks throughout the world. In addition, Professor Alexander directed the Terrorism Studies program (George Washington University) and the Institute for Studies in International Terrorism (State University of New York), totalling 35 years of service.

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