*2011 Soref Symposium Report*

# Between Protests and Power

## Middle East Change and U.S. Interests

May 12–13, 2011

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE *for Near East Policy*

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The Washington Institute for Near East Policy
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## Editor's Note

This volume summarizes the on-the-record portion of The Washington Institute's 2011 Soref Symposium. Speaker and panelist remarks are presented as edited transcriptions or rapporteur's summaries and may be cited as such. Complete audio and video of these presentations are available at www.washingtoninstitute.org.

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# Preface

A few short months ago, the Middle East began a process of convulsive political change unlike any the region had witnessed in memory. Fueled by a heady mix of rage, frustration, hope, and promise, millions took to the street to shake the foundations of the modern Arab state. Though connected by new technologies, their commitment to direct action hearkened back to revolutions from decades past. In some places, like Tunisia and Egypt—whose rulers and armies have a long attachment to the West—regimes long deemed immune to the drifts of local politics have crumbled like dust. Elsewhere, in more despotic corners of the region such as Libya and Syria, cultish rulers have fought back with brutish violence. And still elsewhere, such as the small island of Bahrain, the wavering of local monarchs was settled by the deployment of troops from neighboring states, intent on preserving the status quo.

By all estimates, the Arab uprisings are still the first act of a play whose length and duration is uncertain. Questions abound: With the move from street politics to electioneering in some countries, will the courageous liberal activists who toppled pharaohs and brought dictators to their knees inherit the spoils of their success—or will latecomers to the democratic party, like the Islamists, ultimately win the day? Will Arab armies—critical to the more-or-less peaceful transitions in some countries and no less pivotal to the brutish crackdowns in others—themselves remain intact, cohesive, and loyal? Will the region's monarchies—especially Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Jordan—remain immune to the populist bug spreading throughout the region? And now that the sheen of change is wearing off and Arabs realize that rebuilding their ravaged societies will take many years of hard work and sacrifice, will they keep their inward focus or let their gaze be once again distracted by inflammatory calls for external adventure, most notably the battle against Israel?

Trite as it sounds, the Arab uprisings pose both challenge and opportunity for the United States: they test the way America prioritizes its interests in democracy, stability, and peace; they demand decisions on

*Robert Satloff is The Washington Institute's executive director and Howard P. Berkowitz chair in U.S. Middle East policy.*

what values and interests are worth fighting for; they require new thinking about old alliances; and they stretch the ability of policymakers to deal with urgent crises while never losing sight of the broad strategic threats, such as the still-looming nuclear challenge from Iran.

This report features the prepared summaries of the on-the-record sessions of the 2011 Soref Symposium, which brought together an unprecedented array of leaders, scholars, activists, and policy practitioners from Washington and across the Middle East to examine the nexus of power and protest in the region and to assess the implications of change in Arab states for U.S. policy, both in the near and longer terms.

Robert Satloff
*Executive Director*
*Summer 2011*

# Speaker Biographies

**Amr al-Azm**, a member of the executive council of the Antalya Group of the Syrian opposition, is currently an associate professor of Middle Eastern history and anthropology at Shawnee State University. Previously, he served as head of the Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Damascus and director of Scientific and Conservation Laboratories at the Syrian Department of Antiquities and Museums. A keen observer of events in Syria and the wider Middle East, he has also taught courses in political science at Brigham Young University. He received his doctorate from the University of London's Institute of Archaeology in 1991.

**Thomas E. Donilon** is assistant to the president for national security affairs, a post he has held since October 2010. In that capacity, he leads the National Security Council staff and serves as President Obama's chief advisor on all issues relating to national security. From 2009 to his current appointment, he served as deputy national security advisor. During the Clinton administration, he served as assistant secretary for public affairs and chief of staff to Secretary of State Warren Christopher. An attorney by training, he received his bachelor's degree from the Catholic University of America and his law degree from the University of Virginia.

**Robert Kagan** is a senior fellow with the Brookings Institution's Center on the United States and Europe. A frequent commentator on U.S. national security, foreign policy, and U.S.-European relations, he writes a monthly world affairs column for the *Washington Post* and contributes regularly to the *Weekly Standard* and *New Republic*. Prior to joining Brookings, he spent thirteen years as a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. From 1984 to 1988, he served as a member of the State Department's Office of Policy Planning, as principal speechwriter for Secretary of State George Shultz, and as deputy for policy in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs. His most recent books include *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (2008), *Dangerous*

*Nation: America's Place in the World from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (2006), and *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (2003).

**Hisham Kassem**, one of Egypt's most prominent democracy activists, is former publisher of *al-Masry al-Youm*, the country's only independent daily newspaper under the Mubarak regime. A staunch advocate of transparency in reporting and media ownership, he has also served as vice president of the liberal opposition al-Ghad Party and chairman of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights. Currently, he is a member of the World Movement for Democracy Steering Committee. In recognition of his efforts, the National Endowment for Democracy honored him with its annual Democracy Award in 2007.

**Martin Kramer** is The Washington Institute's Wexler-Fromer fellow and author of its bestselling monograph *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (2001). The president-designate of Shalem College (in formation), he earned his doctoral degree in Near Eastern studies from Princeton University. During a twenty-five-year career at Tel Aviv University, he directed the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies; taught as a visiting professor at Brandeis University, the University of Chicago, Cornell University, and Georgetown University; and served twice as a fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

**James Larocco** was named director of the National Defense University's Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies in August 2009 after more than thirty-five years as a U.S. diplomat. During his last fifteen years of service, he held several key leadership assignments related to the Middle East, including director-general of the Multinational Force and Observers (2004–2009), principal deputy assistant secretary of state for the Near East (2001–2004), U.S. ambassador to Kuwait (1997–2001), and deputy chief of mission and charge d'affaires in Tel Aviv (1993–1996). Previously, he served as minister-counselor for economic affairs in Beijing, director of the American Institute in Taipei, and deputy director of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh affairs at the State Department, along with key positions at the embassies in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

**Robin Wright**, a joint fellow with the U.S. Institute of Peace and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, has reported from more than 140 countries for the *Atlantic, Foreign Affairs, International Herald Tribune, Los Angeles Times, New Yorker, New York Times Magazine, Sunday Times of London, Washington Post,* and others. She has also appeared on *Charlie Rose, The Colbert Report, Face the Nation, Hardball, Meet the Press,* and *This Week,* as well as newscasts on ABC, CBS, CNN, MSNBC,

NBC, and PBS. Author of the forthcoming book *Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion across the Islamic World,* she has won numerous journalism awards, including the UN Correspondents Association Gold Medal for coverage of foreign affairs, the National Magazine Award, the Overseas Press Club Award, and journalist of the year honors from the American Academy of Diplomacy.

**Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin,** the Kay fellow on Israeli national security at The Washington Institute, retired recently after more than forty years' service in the Israel Defense Forces, including the final five as head of IDF defense intelligence. A much-decorated fighter pilot, he also served as defense attaché in Washington, commandant of the IDF National Defense College, and deputy commander of the Israeli Air Force. He holds a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

**Dalia Ziada,** director of the North Africa Bureau at the American Islamic Congress, is an Egyptian activist and blogger whose efforts to promote human rights and democracy have garnered local and international acclaim. Winner of the 2010 Anna Lindh Mediterranean Journalist Award for online media, she was named by *Newsweek* as one of the 150 most influential women in the world and by *Time* magazine as a rights champion. In addition to her own popular blog, she has worked as a foreign affairs reporter with *al-Ahram* newspaper in Cairo, as the Tharwa Foundation's local coordinator in Egypt, and as a researcher with the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, where she helped create the bilingual report *Implacable Adversaries: Arab Governments and the Internet.* In 2007, she founded the Cairo office of the American Islamic Congress, managing the organization's activities in the Middle East and North Africa. Ms. Ziada holds a bachelor's degree from Ain Shams University and is currently pursuing a master's degree in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

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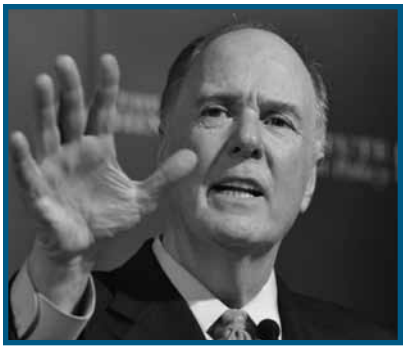




# Michael Stein Address on U.S. Middle East Policy

# Michael Stein Address on U.S. Middle East Policy

*Thomas E. Donilon*

Prepared Remarks

Thank you for this opportunity to speak at The Washington Institute at such an important moment in the history of the Middle East.

Since its founding in 1985, this organization has played a key role in America's understanding of this region. I know firsthand what remarkable scholars you've assembled here over the years and have been fortunate to work with many of them, inside and outside of government. Indeed, we've hired several into this administration, so thank you for nurturing such great talent.

I want to thank Rob Satloff for his invitation and kind introduction. Rob offered me the chance to either give this speech or to have a conversation with him on stage. Knowing that Rob is the Dick Cavett of think tank heads, I opted for the speech.

I would like to begin this evening with a few reflections on the operation last week against Usama bin Laden.

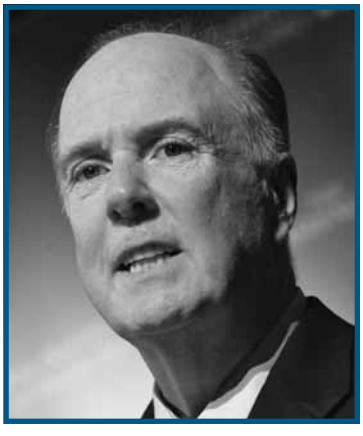
Nearly two years ago—on May 26, 2009—President Obama called Director Panetta and me into the Oval Office. Bin Laden's trail had gone cold. The president told us in no uncertain terms to expand and redouble the effort to find him, and to make it the intelligence community's top priority.

Dedicated professionals painstakingly scrutinized thousands of pieces of information until we found a man we believed was bin Laden's trusted courier and began to track his movements.

In the months leading up to the raid, we combed the intelligence, worked over the options, and met regularly with the president on the way ahead. As that process culminated—having served three presidents—I was struck by how quintessentially presidential this decision was.

On Thursday night the 28th at around 7:00, the president left the Situation Room, where he had received his final briefing on the various courses of action. In that room, the president had received divided counsel from his team, and told us that he would make a decision soon.

The president stood up, walked out of the Situation Room, and walked across the colonnade, past the Rose Garden, into the residence. This decision was his—and his alone—to make.



■ *Thomas E. Donilon has served as assistant to the president for national security affairs since October 2010.*

And then the next morning at about twenty minutes after 8:00, he asked a few of us to come to the Diplomatic Room and told us "It's a go." That's what strikes me now: that we ask our presidents alone to make these exceedingly difficult decisions. And at the end of the day, 300 million Americans were looking to him to make the right decision.

We all know the outcome, but let me make five observations about the operation, all the hard work leading up to it, and what we see as some of the consequences.

First, the decisionmaking process was truly emblematic of President Obama. It was intensely rigorous—he challenged assumptions and pushed on the analysis and the intelligence to make sure we actually knew what we thought we knew. We held more than two dozen interagency meetings, and the president personally chaired five meetings in the White House Situation Room in the six weeks leading up to the operation on Sunday, May 1. When it came time to decide, there were a number of options available, but the president chose to launch the raid for three main reasons: he wanted to limit the risk to innocent civilians—which, by the way, we did. He wanted to be able to prove we found who we were looking for. And he wanted to be able exploit any intelligence found at the scene, which I'll say more about in a moment. One more comment on the process—our team was able to maintain absolute operational security. Through months of work—not a single leak. It is a tribute to the team, the president's leadership of the process, and was key to the success of the operation.

The raid on bin Laden was one of the great achievements in the history of the intelligence community.

Second, the Special Forces who carried out this operation performed brilliantly. Our view was that there was about a 50-50 chance that if we launched this operation we'd get bin Laden, but what gave the president the confidence to go ahead with the operation was his 100 percent faith in the abilities of these warriors who have conducted literally thousands of such missions. As the president said when he met with them last Friday at Fort Campbell, they are the greatest small fighting force in the history of the world.

This was also one of the great achievements in the history of the intelligence community. It was a success that was years in the making—across three U.S. administrations—which is why the president's first two phone calls once our helicopters were out of harm's way were to Presidents Bush and Clinton.

Third, as a result of this raid, we now have the single largest trove of intelligence ever collected from a senior terrorist leader. The intelligence community says it is equivalent to a small college library worth of material. It is remarkable: based on what we know now, we have tens of thousands of video and photo files, and millions of pages of text. One fact is already clear from this intelligence: Usama bin Laden was not simply a marginalized or symbolic figurehead. He remained an operational commander of al-Qaeda—a man directly involved in strategy, operations, propaganda, and personnel. That is why the president's decision to pursue the assault

option mattered so much. In that compound in Abbottabad, we got more than Usama bin Laden.

Which leads me to my fourth point: As of early 2010, we assessed that al-Qaeda was at its weakest point since 2001. The successful assault on bin Laden's compound is a strong blow and important milestone on the way to al-Qaeda's strategic defeat. But al-Qaeda suffers additional fundamental challenges: the Arab Spring narrative presents al-Qaeda with a potent ideological challenge. For its entire existence, al-Qaeda's message has been that violence is the only path forward. It has never had an affirmative program—it could not have been further removed from or irrelevant to those who came to Tahrir Square in January.

Fifth and finally, our action sent a powerful message to America's friends and adversaries: we do what we say we will do. It is a message of persistence, determination, and dedication. No matter the obstacles, the United States does what it says it is going to do. Across presidencies and parties. And the United States has the capabilities to do so. These capabilities and this message were on full display a week ago Sunday. That is an important message that resonates across our other strategic interests.

The quiet and determined pursuit of bin Laden is not the only example of how President Obama matches his words with action. This is also the case with respect to Iran.

President Obama has long understood the regional and international consequences of Iran becoming a nuclear weapons state. That is why we are committed to preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. From his first days in office, he has made clear to Iran that it has a choice: it can act to restore the confidence of the international community in the purposes of its nuclear program by fully complying with the IAEA and UN Security Council resolutions, or it can continue to shirk its international obligations, which will only increase its isolation and the consequences for the regime. There is no escaping or evading that choice.

Already, Iran is facing sanctions that are far more comprehensive than ever before. As a result, it finds it hard to do business with any reputable bank internationally; to conduct transactions in Euros or dollars; to acquire insurance for its shipping; or to gain new capital investment or technology infusions in its antiquated oil and natural gas infrastructure. In that critical sector alone, close to $60 billion in projects have been put on hold or discontinued. Other sectors are clearly being affected as well. Leading multinational corporations understand the risk of doing business with Iran—and are choosing to no longer do so. These are companies you've heard of: Shell, Toyota, Kia, Repsol, Deutsche Bank, UBS, and Credit Suisse, to name just a few. The impact is real.

Unless and until Iran complies with its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and all relevant UN Security Council resolutions, we will continue to ratchet up the pressure. As the president has said: "Iran can prove that its intentions are peaceful. It can meet its obligations under

The Arab Spring narrative presents al-Qaeda with a potent ideological challenge. For its entire existence, its message has been that violence is the only path forward.

the NPT and achieve the security and prosperity worthy of a great nation. It can have confidence in the Iranian people and allow their rights to flourish. For Iranians are heirs to a remarkable history."

Like all NPT parties, Iran has the right to peaceful nuclear energy. But it also has a responsibility to fulfill its obligations. There is no alternative to doing so.

That is why—even with all the events unfolding in the Middle East—we remain focused on ensuring that Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons.

But as you all well know, the Iranian regime's nuclear program is part of a larger pattern of destabilizing activities throughout the region: In Iraq—where, as our former commander General Odierno said last summer, "They continue to be involved in violence specifically directed at U.S. forces"; in Syria, where it has helped the Asad regime suppress pro-democracy demonstrations; and in Lebanon, where it continues to arm Hizballah.

So make no mistake, we have no illusions about the Iranian regime's regional ambitions. We know that they will try to exploit this period of tumult, and we will remain vigilant. But we must also remember that Iran has many weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

Iran has the right to peaceful nuclear energy. But it also has a responsibility to fulfill its obligations.

Iran's model, like al-Qaeda's, lacks a vision relevant to our times. It is a model that could not be more out of step with the sentiments of the Arab Spring. This model has the following characteristics:

- First, a corrupt, mismanaged, and isolated economy that offers the younger generation little hope for a better future. It is an economy increasingly working for the security services like the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and elites, and not for the people of Iran.
- Second, the denial of the basic human rights of freedom of expression—the very liberties people across the Middle East are prepared to risk their lives to claim.
- Third, a political leadership focused on preserving its reign at all costs, including by unleashing violence against its own citizens, rather than enabling its citizens to flourish.
- Fourth, the pursuit of policies that have worked to make a great civilization and people an isolated state, increasingly unable to carry on basic interactions with the rest of the world.

So it's no surprise, then, that Iran's world view bears little or no resemblance to the movements afoot in the streets of Tunis, Cairo, Benghazi, and Deraa.

Iranian leaders' attempts to declare themselves the inspiration for these demonstrators are belied by their clear hypocrisy: demanding justice for others while crushing their own people's demands.

Our observation is that since the elections in 2009, the regime has been heavily focused internally—on silencing dissent and preserving itself.

And as you might expect, we now see fissures developing among the ruling class—a dispute that has nothing to do with meeting the needs and aspirations of the Iranian people. It also reflects a fundamental question: whether Iran has the confidence to engage with the outside world—a prospect that has been offered and that is in the overwhelming interest of its people. As the president has said to Iran's leaders: "We know what you're against, now tell us what you're for."

Externally, Iran's destabilizing activities are backfiring by uniting its neighbors in the Gulf—this was something I heard often when I visited the Gulf last month. And this is something Arab leaders are saying not just in private, but in public as well. The Gulf Cooperation Council recently said it was "deeply worried about continuing Iranian meddling" and accused Tehran of fueling sectarianism.

I want to be clear: The door to diplomacy remains open to Iran. But that diplomacy must be meaningful and not a tactical attempt to ward off further sanctions.

These choices remain available to the Iranian government. In the meantime, America and our partners will keep the pressure on by continuing our current sanctions efforts and seeking new lines of activity to target.

We will continue the hard work of building a regional security architecture, maintaining a strong military presence, equipping our friends with early warning and missile defense systems—including our phased, adaptive approach.

We do all these things because they are profoundly in our national interest. And we do them because America stands by its friends and allies. And in this region we have no closer friend and ally than the state of Israel.

The U.S.-Israel relationship is a close friendship, rooted in shared values and cultural common ground. But it has also evolved into a multilayered strategic partnership, to advance shared interests and counter common threats.

Our commitment to Israel's security is unshakeable. We understand the threats that Israel faces. We have to understand them, because those who threaten Israel also threaten us.

This starts at the strategic level, where our nations have worked together from the certainties of the Cold War to the uncertainties of the Arab Spring to forge a conception of the strategic landscape. We have differed at times about the exact contours of the landscape, but through sustained and very open dialogue we have enriched each other's understanding of the security challenges we both face.

We have shared our best thinking about the most effective ways to match our resources to the requirements that flowed from our strategic worldview. At the highest level, there are regular meetings and phone calls between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu. They will meet again next week at the White House.

The door to diplomacy remains open to Iran. But that diplomacy must be meaningful, not a tactical attempt to ward off further sanctions.

We also conduct these discussions through an array of channels: The strategic dialogue, the Joint Political-Military Group, and many more. These channels have been ongoing and have proved their worth at every level of our governments.

The enduring relationships our senior leaders have forged with their Israeli counterparts have produced a rock-solid foundation of trust between the Pentagon and the Israeli Ministry of Defense. In 2010 alone, there were nearly 200 senior-level Defense Department visitors to Israel, and Israeli defense officials visit us just as often.

Our multilayered dialogue has produced concrete steps that enhance Israel's security. While some are focused on noise and distraction, we are focused on fundamentals. And let me say this as plainly as I can—the fundamentals of this security relationship are stronger than they have ever been.

Everyone in this room knows that we are committed to maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge and back that commitment with about $3 billion of foreign military financing every year, regardless of the budget environment. This has helped Israel secure its future in a tough neighborhood. At the same time, we have made our own best technology available, such as the Joint Strike Fighter and sophisticated standoff weapons, so that Israel can defend against evolving threats.

Our commitment to Israel's security is unshakeable.

For more than two decades, the United States has also been working to improve the protection of Israel's population from the very real and urgent threat of rockets and missiles by partnering with Israel to develop an extensive missile defense architecture. We cooperate across the continuum of development, deployment, and operation of these systems. Our financial and technological support was essential to the Arrow and David's Sling systems to defend against long- and short-range ballistic missiles.

A recent example of the president's commitment to protect Israel from the scourge of rockets and missiles is our support for Iron Dome, an advanced short-range rocket defense system that has recently been deployed. During the 2008 presidential campaign, then senator Obama visited Sderot, where he saw firsthand the damage from waves of rocket attacks. So, last year, the president requested that Congress provide Israel with an additional $205 million, on top of the FMF support Israel already receives, for the production of Iron Dome. Throughout its development, the United States cooperated closely with Israel, and the additional funding for Iron Dome requested by the president will allow the Israel Defense Forces to deploy additional systems throughout Israel in the years to come.

Already Iron Dome has proven its worth by intercepting eight out of nine rockets fired at Beersheba and Ashkelon in one day.

We are proud to stand by this project. It is imperative that we do so, because there can be no peace without security. The relationship between peace and security is both intricate and reciprocal. There will not be peace

until Israel is secure, but Israel can never be fully secure in the absence of a credible peace.

That is why from day one, President Obama has been committed to a process that can lead to two states—a Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state—living side by side in peace and security.

An enduring two-state solution can only be achieved through negotiations. There are no short-cuts. But no one should take comfort in the status quo. As we have learned in the Middle East, the status quo is never static. There are demographic and technological clocks that keep ticking. There is a new generation of leaders who will emerge in the region as a result of the changes that are now taking place. And it is in everyone's interest that they see that peace is possible.

Across the Middle East this is a time of unprecedented transformation and uncertainty. I know there are those who see the specter of new threats and great risks on the horizon. We understand that view. Even without its leader, al-Qaeda continues to plot the death of innocents. Iran retains its nuclear ambitions and destabilizing activities. And Israel and America continue to confront a range of daunting threats. We will remain ever vigilant to these challenges.

But this is also a time of great opportunity for America and its allies.

Our administration came to office determined to restore American prestige, authority, and influence. This means not just charting a bold course, but following it. Not just setting difficult goals, but having the persistence and determination to achieve them. Not just saying what we intend to do, but doing it. On the threat from al-Qaeda and Iran and on Israel's security, we are doing just that. Thank you.

There will not be peace until Israel is secure, but Israel can never be fully secure in the absence of a credible peace.

2011 Soref Symposium



# Between Cairo and Damascus: Change, Uprising, and Revolution in Arab States

# Between Cairo and Damascus: Change, Uprising, and Revolution in Arab States

*Dalia Ziada and Amr al-Azm*

Rapporteur's Summary

## Dalia Ziada

The Egyptian revolution began on January 25, 2011, as protests against police brutality and a corrupt security sector evolved into a popular revolt against an autocratic regime. Unlike in previous protests, many formerly apathetic Egyptians were drawn to demonstrations that focused on deteriorating conditions under the longtime ruling party. The streets of Cairo filled with people from every reach of society, from middle-class activists to the poor and uneducated. Also notable was the large number of women who joined the movement.

Strangely enough, one of the people most responsible for the revolution's success—albeit indirectly—was Usama bin Laden. The September 11 attacks woke the United States to the potential of Middle Eastern youths and the issues most central to them. Only after 2001 did U.S. civil society and NGOs shift focus and open offices in the Middle East and North Africa en masse, connecting with moderate young people who might otherwise have been recruited by bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and other extremist forces. These Western influences helped the region's youths envision alternatives to autocratic regimes other than radicalism and theocracy—two options so often used as justification for preserving secular dictators such as Hosni Mubarak.

Although the internet served as a powerful tool for Egyptian activists to communicate and organize protests, the revolution also stemmed from years of work by Western organizations in collaboration with local groups. Since 2004, the American Islamic Congress has taught Middle Easterners the strategies and techniques needed to effectively resist autocratic governments. For example, one of its major programs involved distributing educational comic books about Martin Luther King Jr. and his nonviolent resistance movement. Inspired by such efforts, Egyptians used nonviolent tactics to break or co-opt the regime's central pillars. Most crucially, they used this approach to appeal to the military, declaring that the people and the army "are one hand."

*Dalia Ziada is director of the North Africa Bureau at the American Islamic Congress.*

As the Arab Spring transitions into the Arab Summer and revolutionary fervor dissipates in Egypt, concerns are emerging as to who will guide the country toward democracy. Some argue that Egypt is rushing too quickly into elections at a time when it still lacks the foundation of liberal values and a free-market economy required to support true democracy. More broadly, the high expectations that Egyptians have for their future are tempered by fears.

One such fear is the power of the military. When the revolution began, the military took a peaceful approach and insisted only on maintaining order as the protector of a civil state. Today, however, military leaders are behaving strangely, giving space to extremists and criminals and refusing to intercede when they are most needed. In addition, they are using some of the old regime's strategies, such as distracting the people with Arab-Israeli concerns.

Another fear is the rise of Islamist groups. The Muslim Brotherhood was not a core part of the revolution at the outset and was only included later to help topple the regime. Although some see the group's apparent political strength as a threat, others argue that its reorganization into a political party means that it can now be held accountable. But because the Brotherhood was not involved in the initial phases of the revolution, many believe that it lacks credibility, accusing the group of focusing on self-promotion rather than national interests. At the same time, Egypt's secular, liberal forces have not organized themselves well enough to effectively contest the Brotherhood in the political arena, despite being widespread and well represented within the country's strong civil society. This is cause for international concern.

Egyptian Salafists are an even more formidable concern than the Brotherhood.

In addition, Egyptian Salafists are an even more formidable concern than the Brotherhood. Following the regime's fall, more than 3,000 of these extremists returned to Egypt after being expelled in the 1990s due to terrorist attacks. They are now operating freely alongside radical Salafi prisoners released by military authorities. The military's failure to counter the effect of these extremist forces has been puzzling.

Lastly, many are concerned that the poor status of women's rights since the regime's fall will continue with the next government. Although former first lady Suzanne Mubarak's work on this issue was artificial and rarely implemented, it was better than the conditions Egyptian women are experiencing today. Women participated in the revolution right alongside men, but they have since been marginalized in the formation of a new government. Not a single woman serves on the constitutional committee or any of the country's other key decisionmaking bodies. Despite these serious challenges, however, there is optimism for the future as long as the international community remains politically and financially engaged.

## Amr al-Azm

On March 18, 2011, not long after the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, protests broke out in Deraa, Syria. Previously, a group of schoolchildren had echoed the revolutionary fervor spreading across the region by scribbling "down with the regime" on a wall of their school. The government, intolerant of such behavior, had quickly imprisoned them. When parents asked about the children's whereabouts, local authorities insulted them and refused to release the detainees. Deeply insulted and humiliated, the parents launched protests, and thus began the movement that has spread throughout Syria.

Currently, the protestors consist mainly of rural and poor citizens, while middle-class Syrians remain disengaged because they are wary of joining a losing battle. This situation reflects the cultural divide between the country's rural, poorer class and urban merchant class. Therefore, compared to Egypt and Yemen, a smaller percentage of the Syrian population is participating in demonstrations. Syria also lacks a strong civil society, which has served as a means of connecting people in other countries and helping them express their demands. If the Syrian opposition hopes to engage the middle class, it will need to unify and develop clear leadership.

The regime has consciously maintained this divide by playing on class and sectarian tensions. Damascus perpetuates the belief that it alone is the guardian of Syrian minorities, and that without the regime's protection, they would fall prey to the will of the Sunni majority. The government also argues that its downfall would spell the end of a unified Syrian state, which would break down according to cultural divides.

The regime's strategy has been marked by total oppression and brutal violence as well. Authorities are arresting and beating masses of people, apparently subscribing to the logic that if they can prevent one day of demonstrations in key locations, they can move beyond the protest stage and begin negotiations. In that scenario, the regime could try to appease the protestors by meeting their demands for stability and improved living conditions while neglecting their calls for freedom and democracy. Damascus naively believes that if it can give the people stability, it can return Syria to normalcy and gloss over real change.

President Bashar al-Asad's recent announcement that the military will no longer open fire on protestors may indicate a change in strategy. Perhaps the regime realizes that shooting people has been ineffective and has attracted unwanted international attention. If so, it could decide to focus more on mass arrests rather than open brutality. Although this shift would not dramatically alter the protestors' lot, it would show that international pressure is slowly making an impact, in defiance of the argument that the United States carries no leverage in Syria. If this is in fact the case, the international community should increase the pressure even further.

The regime may be able to hold on for some time, but it cannot survive in the long run—too much damage has been done in terms of its

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international standing and human rights abuses. Even if Asad were to survive, his government does not have the money to fully meet the protestors' demands. Economic reform must go hand in hand with political reform, a process that the regime has proved unable to meaningfully implement. Going forward, the United States and Europe must continue to pressure Asad and support the protestors.

2011 Soref Symposium



# The Arab Spring: Implications for America and the Middle East

# The Arab Spring: Implications for America and the Middle East

*Hisham Kassem, Amos Yadlin, and James Larocco*

Rapporteur's Summary

## Hisham Kassem

No one can predict when regimes will collapse; when change comes, it comes quickly. On January 24, only a day before the Egyptian uprising began, it was not clear whether Hosni Mubarak's regime would fall; yet by January 28, CEOs had joined people in rags to protest against him.

Today, the facts on the ground are favorable for democratic transition in Egypt. Some observers worry about the outcome due to fears regarding the Muslim Brotherhood. But most of the votes the group received at the peak of its electoral popularity were of the "I hate Mubarak" variety, not votes for the Brotherhood's program. Now that the regime has fallen, the group will no longer receive the protest vote. Furthermore, Brotherhood supporters turned out for past elections in which relatively few other Egyptians bothered to vote, whereas national turnout is likely to be high going forward. Currently, the group has around 100,000 members at most—it will be lucky to garner 20 percent of the next parliamentary vote, and 10 percent is more likely.

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Much of the old elite will do well in the next elections. Especially outside the main cities, the local elite dominated in the past by making use of family and tribal connections, and they will continue to do so. Those close to the former ruling National Democratic Party—that is, to their family members, not so much to NDP figures who have held office before or are otherwise too closely tied to the regime—will campaign for seats and are likely to get most of the votes, perhaps 60 percent of the total.

The rest of the votes—around 30 percent—will go to new politicians, many of them liberals. Sixty percent of the population is age twenty-five or younger, so the tribal domination of the past is fading.

The hardcore Islamists, mainly Salafists, will not have much impact on the elections because voting is sacrilegious to them. Their priorities are elsewhere; they are busy attacking Christians, women, and shrines, believing that even Muslim shrines are examples of idolatry. Such activities have not gone over well with the Egyptian people.

The greatest challenge facing the country today is stability. The security situation is not good. Cairo—a city of as many as 20 million people—has effectively had no police service for weeks at a time. Even more troubling is the prospect of serious economic unrest. If the government is unable to pay salaries and people cannot buy food, the situation could quickly turn ugly. For long-term stability, the country needs improvements at the micro level, that is, a better standard of living for the 40 percent of Egyptians who live on less than $2 a day. These people have not felt the trickle-down effects from macro-level economic growth in recent years.

As for anti-Israeli and anti-American sentiment, they are minor issues compared to economic concerns. The largest recent anti-Israel protest in Cairo involved only 800 people, a small number considering the capital's size. Given its need for U.S. economic support and other factors, Egypt will not revoke Camp David or embark on the path of Arab-Israeli war.

## Amos Yadlin

The Arab Spring does not represent an overnight change; it is not like the fall of the Berlin Wall. Rather, it is the beginning of a long process.

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One must not fall prey to generalizations either: there are twenty-two Arab states and fifty-seven Muslim countries worldwide, each with its own unique conditions and responses to the Arab Spring. These societies must be viewed on a case-by-case basis.

Consider the crucial differences between Egypt's revolution and past Iranian uprisings. Egyptians lost their fear and pushed forward when it became clear that the army would not open fire on them, whereas Iranian demonstrators faced the ruthless Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Basij militia. Similarly, the Egyptian elite had no fear of being replaced, unlike their Iranian or even Syrian counterparts—many among Egypt's religious establishment supported regime change, in contrast to Iran, where the establishment is the regime. In addition, the United States has long held tremendous leverage with Cairo but very little with Tehran. Lastly, the social media revolution seen in Egypt sputtered in Iran, where authorities were much more sophisticated in manipulating and disrupting new means of communication.

In general, the Arab Spring is slowing down. Two explanations stand out: first, massive spending by Saudi Arabia and other states, and second, the use of force as seen in Syria and Bahrain.

For its part, Israel regards the Arab Spring with wary hope. This is a moment for democratic values, human rights, and nonviolence to prevail in the Arab world, meaning a greater chance for peace and the weakening of radicalism from Tehran to Damascus, southern Beirut, and Gaza. Demonstrators know that Israel is not the core problem in the Middle East. They are protesting because of poverty and authoritarianism; Israel was merely an excuse used by dictators. And if the revolution reaches Iran, it would be the most important strategic development in the region.

Realistically, there can be no Israeli-Palestinian peace as long as Iran supports Hamas and Hizballah and pursues nuclear weapons.

Despite these potentially profound implications, Israel should restrain its historically proactive tendencies and let the Arab Spring unfold on its own. It must not give other actors any excuse to distract attention from the movement. Long-quiet borders may become active, but any Israeli response should be limited to addressing specific provocations.

As for the future of the Camp David treaty, it is in Egypt's interest to maintain the peace agreement with Israel. No one wants a return to the days when both sides had to arm themselves to the teeth, straining their economies to the breaking point.

Finally, the unexpected timing of the Arab Spring does not represent an intelligence failure on anyone's part. Regime change is difficult to predict—Israelis were aware that Egypt had all the elements in place for such change, but they did not believe it would happen until after Hosni Mubarak's reign was over. In other words, the surprise lay in the timing more than in what actually happened. If a regime with 100,000 informers at its disposal cannot predict its own future, Israel cannot be expected to make such predictions either.

## James Larocco

As the Arab Spring unfolds, the United States must not lose sight of its enduring interests. First and foremost is global access to energy and the freedom of shipping lanes, two concerns shared the world over. U.S. national security depends on economic security, which in turn relies on energy. Second is a strong, secure Israel—a strategically important ally that shares values with the United States. Third is defeating and disarming terrorist groups, an interest that emerged well before the September 11 attacks. Fourth is nonproliferation, especially the risk of tactical nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. This issue—which touches on U.S. policy toward Iran and Pakistan, among others—is important because of the linkage it establishes between states and terrorist groups.

Washington must also bear in mind that not all of the Middle East is Arab. There are four strategic pillars in the region—Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, and Iran—and only one of them is Arab. Obviously, U.S. relations with these countries range from very bad to very good. In Israel, some officials do not like the "strategic pillar" label, but they must recognize their importance in this role. Meanwhile, the Saudis want strategic peace with Israel, which is not shocking considering Riyadh's interest in checking Iran. Turkey remains a wildcard, though its recent stances seem driven by the upcoming parliamentary elections and are not as important as its policies after the vote, especially with regard to Iran. After all, the Turks have 3,000 years of enmity toward the Persians. And as the world's fourteenth-largest economy, Turkey is determined to increase its influence in the region.

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Of course, other Middle Eastern countries are central to U.S. interests as well. Bahrain is important because the U.S. 5th Fleet is based there. Yemen, a key player in keeping the sea lanes clear, faces profound issues—its oil exports are drying up and its capital city will soon run out of water. Jordan is important because of its positive relationship with Israel, including a quiet border. At the same time, Amman has a $1 billion deficit that needs to be addressed.

Egypt is the most strategically important country for the United States outside of the four pillars; it is crucial to Israeli interests as well. The Camp David Accords are sacred and must be upheld, though populist rhetoric against them is to be expected and must be tolerated. Thankfully, Egypt has a strong military with close ties to the United States. As the Arab saying goes, there is no war without Egypt, and no peace without Syria.

2011 Soref Symposium



# When the Dust Settles: The Middle East Circa 2016

# When the Dust Settles: The Middle East Circa 2016

*Robin Wright, Robert Kagan, and Martin Kramer*

Rapporteur's Summary

## Robin Wright

Historically, pessimism has been the most accurate stance to take regarding political developments in the Middle East. The question has not been whether the glass is half full or half empty, but whether there is any water in the glass at all. In light of the Arab Spring, however, a renewed sense of optimism for the region's future is emerging.

This ongoing movement is one of the Middle East's four major turning points in the past century. The first was the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent creation of Turkey and the modern Arab states. The second was the creation of Israel in 1948, and the third was the Iranian revolution of 1979.

Three distinct yet overlapping issues make the Arab Spring so important. First, the revolts are happening simultaneously throughout the region, in markedly different societies, regardless of organization, governance, or religious segmentation. By 2016, every Arab country will have undergone some kind of significant change.

Second, the region is rejecting extremism in what is being referred to as the "counter jihad." For many Muslims, the September 11 attacks were a traumatic event that shook the foundations of their faith and propriety. Moreover, the cost of supporting extremism became too high. Al-Qaeda was unable to fulfill the tangible needs of day-to-day existence such as healthcare, education, and employment. As a result, every poll taken since 2007 has shown declining support for extremism. In its place, people are turning to peaceful civil disobedience to make their voices heard.

Third, the people have begun to challenge Islamic political theology, most strikingly in Iran. The common denominator between all three of these issues is rejection of the status quo coupled with a drive to move forward rather than backward.

Looking to the short-term future, regime change is inevitable in Yemen, Libya, and Syria. The most telling barometer to consider in all three cases is what percentage of the populace still supports each ruler; when that figure falls below 30 percent, change is very likely. Currently, the Yemeni and

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Syrian presidents both stand at 30 percent or higher, but the situation is highly volatile.

Over the next five years, the main concern will be failed expectations, especially in the economic sphere. When rebellions do not deliver real change or fail to live up to their promises, unintended consequences tend to surface.

The Gulf regimes are different, however, because they can buy off their populations without changing their existing structure. For example, Riyadh recently injected $100 billion into the Saudi economy to mask unemployment issues and other structural problems. Regardless of their faults, the Gulf states will not have to address political problems anytime soon.

As for Egypt, it will likely reestablish a relationship with Iran over time. Cairo will no doubt want to distance itself from Mubarak-era policies and avoid being seen as an American puppet.

In the long term, the Middle East will become more democratic but also more Islamic—not the radical brand of Islam espoused by groups such as Hizballah and Hamas, but rather people turning to Islam as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. In this sense, it is important to differentiate between Islamic and Islamist parties, and even between the wide spectrum of Islamist parties. Islamists are those who want sharia as the primary rule of law, including greater use of Islam in the application of daily government. Yet this constituency is going to have to respond to what is happening on the street. We have already seen this play out to a certain degree with the Brotherhood in Egypt, where factions are breaking away because of issues such as the group's opposition to allowing women and Christians to run for the presidency. We will likely see more of this phenomenon: that is, political groups with a core Muslim identity but without hardline Islamist stances on certain issues.

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## Robert Kagan

Most well-informed people once firmly believed that Catholic countries could not become democratic; then that Asian countries could not become democratic; then that Muslim countries could not become democratic. Will the view that Arab countries cannot become democratic join this list of shattered myths?

Not necessarily—the past decade has been a testament to the surprising resilience of autocracies. After the Cold War, America concluded that liberalism had triumphed and that the era of autocrats had ended. Given the current political structure of China and Russia, this has proved false. Yet autocracies have tended to collapse once they become U.S. allies, or once their populations seek entrance into the Western world. To put it simply, autocracies survive if they remain outside American influence, but fall if they become too closely enmeshed in U.S. interests. Where the Arab world fits into this framework remains unclear.

The United States must decide whether it wants to support change in the Middle East or remain content with the status quo. President Obama, like his predecessors, tends to view the region with great trepidation and uncertainty. For now, Washington and its allies need to ensure that the Qadhafi regime falls. They also need to play a significant role in the Syrian crisis. Some measure of involvement is inevitable—remaining on the sidelines now will only prolong the U.S. role in the long run. As for Egypt, Washington must focus on the economy; Western aid will be a decisive factor in the revolution's outcome.

If democracy does spread throughout the Middle East, will it help or harm U.S. interests? History shows that when democracy flourishes in a region, it generally does so to America's benefit. South Korea is an excellent example—although democracy initially empowered leaders who were not as well-disposed to the United States as their autocratic predecessors, the government has adjusted under a new generation of leaders who are comfortable being both nationalists and allies of the United States. Similarly, a more democratic Egypt will not be as good to the United States at first as the Mubarak regime was. Egypt wants to distance itself from everything the regime stood for, even if this means limited involvement with Washington. Yet in the long run, the United States will benefit if fledgling democracies survive past 2016.

## Martin Kramer

Developments in the Middle East can be thought of in terms of the competition between a pro-American circle and an anti-American crescent. Traditionally, the circle comprised Turkey, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states—an informal coalition of unnatural allies held together by Washington's credibility and willingness to use its power. Opposite the circle was the crescent, which included Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestinian Islamists. Like the United States, Iran used all of its power to keep this faction together. Although the crescent was smaller, it had better cohesion due to its size and largely Shiite population.

The key variable in determining the regional picture circa 2016 will be America's ability to resurrect a stable union of unnatural allies. Currently, four middle powers—Turkey, Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia—are regularly operating outside their own borders. By 2016, they will be even more involved in their neighbors' affairs. Egypt might eventually rejoin this group, but that seems unlikely by 2016. The key question is whether the United States will be able to forge an alliance with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. The best way to do so is to be consistent: reward friends and punish enemies, thereby convincing states that they should befriend Washington even if they do not like the company it keeps.

The region's other states—particularly Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, and Yemen—have played important roles in the past under ruthless dictators. But these countries are highly segmented, and as dictators

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continue to fall, the most likely outcome will be a mix of quasidemocratic practices interspersed with regionalism, sectarianism, and endemic violence. As such, Israel will probably be unwilling to part with its best lines of defense, the Jordan Valley and Golan Heights. One fortunate byproduct of the Arab Spring is that Israel and the Palestinians have become an island unto themselves. Yet as soon as either party becomes involved in regional dynamics, this stability will erode.

As for the region's Islamists, they are already powerful and are becoming more so. They are calling the shots in Lebanon, setting the agenda in Egypt, and dominating the scene in Turkey. In each of these cases, democracy has empowered Islamism. Given that they were originally born from repression, Islamist movements have been cautious and stealthy, leading from behind. To counter this trend, opponents of Islamism will need to become more versatile than ever before.

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