

For Each Nation, a Different Approach

by [Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](/experts/aaron-y-zelin)

Sep 13, 2012

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](/experts/aaron-y-zelin)

Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy where his research focuses on Sunni Arab jihadi groups in North Africa and Syria as well as the trend of foreign fighting and online jihadism.



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The United States should engage with the countries that want to work in tandem and tread cautiously where relations will be more problematic.

The tragic death of the American ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens, and his colleagues, along with the breach of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, may lead some Americans to question, in light of such horrific attacks, the United States' future relationship with these countries.

It is important to place these events in context. The United States has long dealt with Middle Eastern governments in which a segment of their populations have harbored anti-American sentiments.

In the past, these countries' leaders were not beholden to anyone, but the challenge now is how to work with democratically elected officials who must take into account their constituents' views. This will indeed make relations more complicated. This is especially the case in Egypt, as was seen by the weak response of Egyptian president Muhammad Morsi, who seemed more concerned about the alleged video than with the attack on the U.S. Embassy. Relations will be tense in the days and weeks ahead because of the apparent alignment of religious populism and the Muslim Brotherhood's attempt to cover its flank from the Salafis. As a result, over time it will likely become more difficult for the United States to work as cooperatively with the Egyptian government as it has in the past. While the United States has economic aid leverage over Egypt, there are inherent limits to American power, especially in the face of a Muslim Brotherhood-led government hostile and opposed to American interests and values.

On the other side of the spectrum is Libya. Unlike Egypt, Libya's new Prime Minister Mustafa Abushagur issued a strong statement supporting the United States and calling for the unity of the two countries in dealing with the menace of violent extremism. Similarly, there was a demonstration in Benghazi and Tripoli today rallying support for the U.S. Consulate, as well as praising Ambassador Stevens for his work with the leadership. This is compared with the Muslim Brotherhood's call for more demonstrations in Egypt against the film this Friday.

This episode provides a window into how relations with countries in the new Middle East might take shape. The

United States should engage with the countries that want to continue to work in tandem, while treading carefully and cautiously with others, where relations will be more problematic and tenuous. In short, each country of the Middle East and North Africa will provide its own set of opportunities and challenges.

Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow fellow at The Washington Institute. ❖

New York Times

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