

The Arab Spring: Safeguarding U.S. Interests for the Long-Term

BY JAMES A. LAROCCO AND WILLIAM L. GOODYEAR

The “Arab Springs” that are underway throughout the region share some common features, including the yearning and visible desires for a variety of “Freedoms From”: freedom from the oppression of dictators and their stooges, freedom from economic exploitation, and freedom from censorship, to name a few. At the same time, these countries have not even begun the national dialogue on what they want “Freedom For.” Do the peoples of this region want democratic competition or the replacement of one oligarchy for another, market or statist economies, full freedom of expression, or limited national and individual discourse?

In our view, as the United States looks at the region, we need to acknowledge several realities:

- The transitions taking place in the region may well last decades, not simply years;
- Each country will choose its own path;
- The United States and other nations can shape that path, but only through a carefully calibrated set of policies and programs, recognizing that the nations in transition will ultimately assert sovereignty over their own futures;
- The stakes for the United States and its allies are high: while “success” may not provide all the U.S. wants, “failure” would have significant negative long-term consequences for U.S. interests, including vital security interests;
- These transitions are indeed historic, and as such, provide an historic opportunity for the U.S. to shape a new Middle East;
- While U.S. economic opportunities for the future may lie in East and South Asia, threats to the U.S. national security interests will continue, if not increase, in the MENA (Middle East and

Ambassador James A. Larocco is Director of National Defense University's Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESAS). Mr. William L. Goodyear is a research associate at NESAS.

countries under transition have been encouraged by the \$770 million regional fund

North Africa) region. As attractive as pivoting to Asia/Pacific may be, the U.S. must keep a sharp focus on the MENA region for many years to come.

As a new administration takes office, a reset of the U.S. approach to the MENA region is in order. The first step is to reaffirm the values that will guide our policy toward the region, with a clear restatement of those values publicly and privately to both new and older leaders in the region. The second step is to complete a country-by-country comprehensive analysis of its strategic interest to the U.S., its trajectory toward success or failure, and the ability to effect positive change that prevents failure and preserves and preferably enhances U.S. interests. The third step is to develop those policies and programs that will best ensure that failure is avoided and U.S. interests are preserved and sustained. The fourth step is to have a full, straightforward dialogue on the short and long-term values, policies, strategies and programs with Congress and with regional leaders. Unless this program achieves buy-in by both, it cannot be sustained.

Countries under transition have been encouraged by the \$770 million regional fund proposed by the last administration and still under debate in the Congress. That fund should be approved, reaffirming the United States' commitment to shaping a path toward success for the MENA nations in transition. At the same time, how these funds and bilateral programs are developed should be guided by the approach outlined above. Thinking regionally, while acting bilaterally will best serve U.S. interests in the long run.

Part I: The Arab Springs in History

Assessments of the "Arab Spring" by Western scholars and commentators have been extremely divided. Optimists have predicted a paradigm shift in which overthrown dictators will be replaced over time throughout the region by representative democracies that guarantee human rights. At the other extreme, some argue that these movements signal the rise of Islamists bent on establishing societies and polities in strict compliance with Sharia law, with minorities and women in particular losing their rights and freedoms.

Two years on, we have found that nearly all the early predictions – both optimistic and pessimistic – have missed the mark. The failure of Western academics, scholars, and commentators to accurately understand these movements can be partly attributed to a desire among these scholars to see the Arab Spring as a repudiation of the notion of Arab exceptionalism; rather, in their view it proved that Arabs aspire to the same democratic values and institutions as the West.

Yet, in order to truly understand what happened in the Arab world from the end of 2010 and continuing until today, one must look back to the history of the development of nation-states in the region since the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

The lessons of history teach us that throughout the past century, Arab states have suffered from a fundamental absence of legitimacy. Simply put, the peoples of this region will not accept states that do not conform to their national desires and aspirations.

The Arab Spring is only the most recent example of the consequences of this "legitimacy gap." It demonstrates that approaches to the region that are not tailored bilaterally and do not fully take into account the specific political cultures of each country, as well as the region at large, are destined to fail.



NATO Review

Tahrir Square in Egypt

The End of Empire and the Rise of Arabism

1922 marked the end of the over 600-year reign of the Ottoman Empire. Long before that point, elites throughout the empire had criticized the Ottoman caliphate as “backwards” and a source of weakness vis-à-vis European powers. Yet, the Tanzimat reforms intended to transform the empire into a modern state that these elites instituted had the effect of alienating the diverse populations that it governed by disrupting long-established social and economic practices. This alienation grew at the beginning of the 20th century when the Young Turks, under the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), instituted even more extreme reforms that recast the empire as a primarily Turkish national state. These reforms had the effect of eroding the legitimacy of the empire as the state began to disregard the cultural and religious norms that had defined the relationship between rulers and ruled in the region for centuries.¹ The result was a growing gap between the state and its subjects, one in which those who

were ruled felt a progressively weaker connection to those in power. The Hashemites, who led the Arab Revolt against the Turks in order to re-establish the caliphate in the wake of CUP reforms, would eventually exploit this gap.²

Meanwhile, the same ideological forces that had inspired other nationalist movements around the world at this time had already been operating throughout the Arab world. Arab thinkers, both Christian and Muslim, had posited their own unique national identity based on the Arabic language and a shared history that deemphasized religious differences prior to the Arab Revolt.

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire became an opportunity for Arab nationalists to take a more prominent role in determining the political future of the region. Though Arab nationalists, like Saad Zaghlul in Egypt, were largely suppressed in the colonial period following World War I and lasting until after World War II, the ideology of Arab nationalism successfully spread throughout the region.

The desire for a unity of the Arab umma that reflected the character of the Arab population motivated a number of different political and anti-colonial resistance movements. These movements found their most prominent manifestations in the governments of Gamal Abd al-Nasser and the Ba'thist regimes in Syria and Iraq.

While vastly differing on a number of important issues, Nasserist Egypt and Ba'thist Syria and Iraq shared some common ideological underpinnings. Most important among these was the commitment to the pan-Arab ideal (a single Arab nation-state) and to implementing socialist economic policies. Indeed, the most successful political movements in the Arab world during the middle of the 20th century included some form of these two themes among their ideological pillars. Ultimately, however, the pan-Arabist movement was unable to achieve its lofty goals.

The brief experiment of the United Arab Republic demonstrated the practical difficulties behind actually putting Arab nationalism into practice. Arab nationalists had to contend with the growth of other national identities that built upon the histories of specific parts of the Arab world.

Yet, even more importantly, Arab nationalists failed to adequately improve the livelihoods of the majority of their citizens. Rather than instituting a new form of egalitarian politics and economics, Arab nationalist leaders simply substituted themselves for the Ottoman and colonial class of elites. The disparity between wealthy and poor continued to grow, once again undermining the legitimacy of the state.

The Security State and Islamism

The 1970s and 1980s marked another era of transition for the region. The waning of Soviet power and influence and the repeated failures of Arab states to effectively unify did much to discredit the Arab Nationalist/Socialist ideology. Leaders

in the Arab world were forced to either abandon the policies they had developed based on these ideologies (as in the case of Sadat's Egypt) or to use increasingly repressive measures to enforce them (as in Ba'thist Syria and Iraq).

As these states lost the popular mandate to govern, they often turned to more authoritarian measures to maintain their grasp on power. In many cases opposition parties were banned from participating in the political process and democratic institutions were simply used to rubber stamp decisions made by de facto dictators.

By the 1990s, whatever elements of civil-society that had existed in many Arab states was completely suppressed in favor of an elaborate security apparatus designed to protect the state and enforce the rule of law.

After the failure of radical leftist opposition forces to affect change in the 1980s, the only credible opposition to increasingly authoritarian regimes came from Islamists who had become energized, among other things, by the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Islamists generally took one of two approaches to their opposition to the new security state. The first was to engage in violent resistance to the regimes they operated under. Groups such as al-Jama'at al-Islamiyyah conducted a wide-ranging campaign of terror designed to overthrow these governments and institute Sharia law.

The other approach Islamist groups took was to work through volunteer organizations within the existing system to build social mobilization networks. The Muslim Brotherhood was among the most prominent of these groups.

Through networks of hospital, schools, and charity organizations, the Muslim Brotherhood and similar groups throughout the region were able to generate massive popular support and goodwill. Their activities were designed to

demonstrate the relevance of Islam to contemporary social, economic, and political conditions and provided an obvious counterbalance to the inadequacies of the authoritarian regimes they operated under. Furthermore, attempts to suppress these organizations seemed to only increase their followings. As became evident in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, by the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century these groups were by far the largest and most well organized political groups in the region.

The Arab Spring and State-Society Relationship in the Arab World

If one imagines that the Arab Spring marked the beginning of a new era of state-society relationships in the Arab World one could reasonably ask: What is the ideological basis for that relationship?

While the peoples of the Arab World certainly demonstrated in the Arab Spring what they wanted “Freedom From” (oppression, authoritarianism, and corruption), it is not at all clear what they want “Freedom For”.

Islamists were able to sweep into power in Egypt and Tunisia following the downfall of authoritarian regimes there, but this was due as much to their high degree of organization and experience in social mobilization as it was to any popular mandate to rule.

Meanwhile, the disorganized and fractured secular political groups – key in the downfall of these regimes – were unable to contend strongly in elections.

All this indicates that the messages of these parties were not nearly as important as the vehicles used for disseminating it. That a secular and nationalist government was elected into power in Libya only strengthens this theory. Islamists under Gaddafi had never been allowed to organize locally or nationally and were unable to unite effectively.

Indeed, in answering the question of what the Arab world wants “Freedom For,” it seems as though no single answer will be sufficient. What is clear, however, is that the ideological pillars of Islamism, nationalism and state responsibility for the economy will define the political and economic parameters of the region.

That is to say, in order for states to obtain a popular mandate to rule they will have to employ elements of each of these ideologies. The inherent diversity of the populations of the various states of the Arab world means that each state will interact with these ideologies in ways that are both connected and radically different.

As these ideologies increasingly shape the direction of each country’s domestic and foreign policies, it will become very clear that the most effective way for the United States or any other country to deal with region is to “think regionally but act bilaterally.”

Part II: Thinking Regionally, Acting Bilaterally

What does it mean to think regionally, but act bilaterally? On an operational level, it means using coordinated bilateral agreements and relationships to achieve regional goals and objectives. Putting this into practice, however, is more difficult than it sounds. The region is entering a long and difficult period of transition whose end-state is nearly impossible to predict. Defining regional goals and objectives at this early stage of the transition is almost certainly a futile effort. The United States must remain committed to promoting the values of democracy, human rights and free market economics.

That said, we need to remove the blinders from our eyes. While we Americans view democracy and all this entails as a value, a goal as well as a process, there are many in the Arab Spring who view democracy simply as a process to achieve

goals and put in place values that are inconsistent, if not diametrically opposed, to our concept of what democracy means.

Hamas in Gaza is a vivid example of this. Just six months after coming to power in Gaza via what were judged largely free and fair democratic elections, Hamas leaders staged a successful coup to seize the reins of power. There are those in the Arab Spring countries who have secured seats in parliaments and assemblies through democratic elections who are crystal clear as to their un- and anti-democratic values and goals, while there are others who have yet to demonstrate their commitment to democratic values such as equal rights for all, including women and minorities.

The United States will have to walk a tricky path to maintain its influence in the region, promote our fundamental values while also tailoring policies and programs to deal with each country's specific state of transition. There is no short cut or template and no real historical parallel. We must do the hard work of shaping new approaches to each of these countries.

A practical way of thinking regionally and acting bilaterally in the Middle East during this period of transition calls for the United States to first clearly define and articulate our key strategic interests and equities in the region.

In all our travels throughout the region, we repeatedly hear a common complaint: "We are not sure what U.S. policy and priorities are. It seems to change from day to day. It's human rights one day, basing rights another. It's economic transparency one day, preferences for American investment and exports the next. We therefore find it difficult to shape our own policy to develop the kind of productive relationship we must have: one that respects our sovereignty, identity and interests while achieving common ground with the United States' goals and objectives."

Key strategic interests and equities are those things that, if compromised, would constitute an absolute failure of U.S. foreign policy in the region. They are the things that the U.S. would be willing to take serious and significant actions, even going to war, to defend. It is important for the United States to clearly articulate these interests so that it can craft an approach to the region that allows it to act bilaterally to promote our fundamental values, but without risking our key strategic equities. Doing so will also help our regional allies pursue courses of action that benefit our shared interests.

Matrix of Key U.S. Strategic Interests in the Region

In few regions throughout the world are U.S. interests more intertwined and interconnected than they are in the Middle East. Depicted below is a "matrix" of what we believe to be the United States' most important strategic interests in the Middle East. The matrix demonstrates the hierarchy that exists among U.S. strategic interests as well as the reality of their contingency upon each other. While it may be impossible to define "success" for our strategies and policies for the Arab Spring, being unable to secure any one of these interests would almost certainly spell failure.

Energy Security. Today, the growth of the world economy is heavily dependent upon the availability of cheap and plentiful energy, most especially in the form of oil and natural gas. Oil alone accounts for 33% of total world energy consumption while natural gas takes up another 24%.³ Yet, that 57% does not even begin to tell the full story of how crucial petroleum is to the United States and global economies.

We believe it is fair to assert that with the fall of the Soviet Union and communist ideology, the most prominent existential threat to the U.S. is

Diagram A



the availability of energy in adequate, continuous and sustained volumes at affordable prices.

Petroleum products, and particularly oil, have unique features that make them indispensable to world use. The fact remains that there is no single product that can provide the same amount of energy that oil does while also being as easily transported and converted into as many essential products (gasoline, plastics, fertilizers, etc.). To measure the true importance of oil to the economy, it is generally estimated that a sustained increase of \$10 per barrel to the price of oil will shave 0.2% off the global economy in the following year – this for an economy that only grows by around 3.5% a year in good times.⁴

Still, the economic dimension to energy security is only part of the story. Oil is a military strategic necessity of the highest order. In 2010 alone, the U.S. military consumed 5 billion gallons of fuel in military operations – making it the world’s single largest consumer of petroleum.⁵

Military leaders understand that demand for oil will only increase in the coming years. Thus, the United States will remain committed to ensuring the availability of cheap and

plentiful energy for the global market for the foreseeable future. The U.S. has historically done this either by producing that energy for global consumption, or by working with foreign governments to make energy sources available and keep world prices at a level that does not harm economic growth.

these countries must remain free from foreign interference and domestic unrest

While the United States is certainly working to develop new technologies and sources of energy that will minimize its dependence on oil, the fact remains that until a substitute for oil is found it will continue to be one of the most important strategic resources on the planet.

No other region is more crucial to providing for the world’s energy needs than the Middle East. The region is home to 48% of total world proven oil reserves. Additionally, vast fields of natural gas are present throughout the Gulf (approximately 16% of world reserves) and others have recently been found in the Mediterranean.⁶ For the United States to meet its other foreign policy commitments, support its allies and promote strong global economic growth, it is absolutely crucial that these energy sources remain available to the world market.

Ensuring the availability of these energy sources to world markets means that certain key conditions in the region will have to be maintained. Firstly, countries with crucial energy reserves will have to be secure and stable. These countries must remain free from foreign interference and domestic unrest. The best way to ensure this is by promoting regional economic growth and integration while also combating destabilizing forces like terrorism and nuclear proliferation. If the security of these countries

China, India and other developing countries demand lifestyles more similar to the United States and Europe

is not maintained, then access to their energy reserves will be nearly impossible.

Secondly, the sea-lanes and passageways that these energy sources pass through to reach global markets must remain safe and open. The U.S. Energy Information Administration has identified six key “choke points” at which significant quantities of world oil pass each year. Three of these choke points are in the Arab world – with almost 20% of global oil traded each year passing through the Strait of Hormuz alone.⁷ The closing of any one of these choke points would have a drastic effect on the price of oil and could leave key U.S. allies in Europe and Asia without the oil supplies they need to keep their economies in working order.

Freedom of Navigation. While safeguarding sea-lanes and naval passageways to ensure global energy security is certainly the United States’ number one priority in the region, it is clear that freedom of navigation is also an important strategic interest in its own right. Since 1982, the United States has staunchly maintained that no nation may unilaterally restrict the rights and freedoms of the international community in navigation and over flight and other high seas uses.⁸ Indeed, in many respects, maintaining Freedom of Navigation is one of the fundamental pillars of U.S. foreign policy throughout the globe.

Maintaining the peaceful maritime rights of all nations is crucial to the normal functioning and flow of global commerce.⁹ Over 80% of the bulk and 70% of the value of total global trade is transported over the high seas.¹⁰ The importance

of this trade is only likely to grow in the upcoming years as the global economy becomes more and more integrated pushing people in China, India and other developing countries to demand lifestyles more similar to those of their counterparts in the United States and Europe.

Freedom of navigation is also a key aspect of U.S. global military strategy. In order to promote global stability and security, the United States must be able to maintain a military presence throughout the world. This presence is not possible if countries do not respect the right of innocent passage of foreign warships through territorial waters. This right is so crucial to U.S. foreign policy interests that in 2011 alone, the U.S. Navy conducted operational assertions of freedom of navigation in 14 different countries, often on more than one occasion. Indeed, without this right, it is clear that it would be nearly impossible for the United States to achieve its other strategic objectives, such as non-proliferation and countering violent extremism.

Free and secure maritime passage around the globe is fundamental to the global order. One need only look at the places on the planet where this right is challenged, such as Somalia, to see the consequences of allowing this freedom to be curtailed.

Non-Proliferation. Nuclear non-proliferation has been a primary U.S. strategic objective in the Middle East and around the world since the end of World War II. The destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons are unparalleled in human history. We still do not fully understand the long-term health and environmental consequences of a nuclear attack on a country, its land and its people. The recent environmental tragedy in Fukushima, Japan has further demonstrated that, even in situations where a country has developed its nuclear capabilities

purely for energy generation, the potential for devastating consequences from accidental malfunction is extraordinary.

It is clear that nuclear weapons bring with them a host of dangers even for countries in relatively stable regions and without pressing security concerns. It is even clearer that introducing nuclear weapons into a region as volatile as the Middle East carries with it risks of an even higher magnitude. While the United States is committed to preventing any nuclear proliferation, the most pressing immediate objective is to deny Iran nuclear weapons. Should Iran acquire a nuclear weapon, nearly all of the United States' other strategic interests in the region would be put at risk.

The threat to our allies' security and interests, as well as stability in the region is only one aspect of a nuclear-armed Iran. In our view, the most profound consequence of Iranian development of a nuclear weapon would be closing the curtain on the very principle of nuclear non-proliferation, a principle every U.S. administration has declared a pillar of U.S. values and vision for more than half a century.

It should also be remembered that Iran was an original signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and, should it develop a weapon, it would be the first signatory to break the treaty. In ending the principle of non-proliferation, a nuclear Iran would set off a nuclear arms race in the Gulf that could spread throughout the region and beyond, reversing 50 years of U.S. foreign policy efforts.

Countering Violent Extremism. The last decade of American foreign policy towards the greater Middle East has revolved to a great extent around the issue of combating terrorist activities in and emanating from the region. Terrorism not only threatens civilian lives, but also undermines the legitimacy of states throughout the

region. It slows economic progress and continues the cycle of sectarian violence that has historically kept the region unstable.

Countries undergoing transition are facing ever-escalating threats of terrorist violence as the security regimes of former dictators are eroded. The attacks on the American consulate in Libya are only the most recent and prominent examples of how terrorists are using the instability of transition to consolidate their base of support and conduct attacks on those that are attempting to strengthen state institutions and promote national unity. Even before these attacks, Libya had become a conduit of arms and drugs for terrorist organizations in the Sahel.

Syria is threatening to join Libya as an area in which extremist organizations can operate freely. The initially largely non-ideological opposition has splintered into a number of increasingly radicalized resistance units, many of whom are funded and supported by international jihadists. As the violence there escalates to increasingly horrific levels and the interior of the country becomes more and more ungovernable, it is very possible that terrorist organizations will be able to use the chaos to launch attacks against any number of regional targets.

Terrorist activities extend beyond sectarian or jihadist goals. Pirates in the Gulf of Aden threaten key oil shipping lanes while those in Mali engage in human and drug trafficking. The presence of these organizations in the region undermines the monopoly of force traditionally held by the state. For countries undergoing transition, terrorist organizations pose a serious threat to the state's ability to establish the rule of law or build a civil society.

The consequences of a curtailment of U.S. counterterrorism capabilities could precipitate the failure of a number of other key regional equities. If transitioning countries are unable to contain



NATO Review

Free elections in Tunisia, 2011.

terrorist organizations and activities, the region could face stalled economic growth, increased violence and a breakdown of the social order.

Maintaining Israeli Security. Israeli security is essential to promoting a number of U.S. strategic objectives. At the same time, it has always been clear that U.S. commitment to Israel's security transcends those interests; indeed, it is a moral commitment with deep roots among American society and people.

A comprehensive peace between Israel and all its neighbors, U.S. counterterrorism strategies, and the longer-term goals of regional economic integration all depend upon the continued security of the Israeli state. If Israeli security cannot be guaranteed in the future, then the likelihood of regional conflict will increase significantly and transitioning states, especially Israel's neighbors, will see their hopes dashed for new investment, loans and trade necessary for the economic

development that the youth believe the transitions will bring.

Israelis are understandably anxious over the directions that many of the transitions seem to be taking. The loss of long standing relationships with members of the former leaders of the Arab world have left Israeli leaders wondering how they will be able to reconstruct a security network that had been integral to their national defense.

On the one hand, they worry that the Sinai has become a zone of instability with the constant threat of attacks emanating from there. If this occurs, Israel may be forced to take actions that would almost certainly put them at odds with new leadership in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab World.

The transit of weapons, including Fajr longer-range missiles, through the Sinai was a pre-requisite of the arming of Gaza and the spike in attacks on Israel that led to Israel's decision to strike Gaza in mid-November 2012. Without

question, the increased flow of arms was a result of transitions within both Egypt and Libya.

In addition to events in the Sinai, the breakdown of order in Syria has provided new opportunities for Hezbollah to expand their operations. If they are able to create a corridor between southern Lebanon and western Syria, they could open up a new front from which to attack Israel. The reprisals that would almost certainly follow could lead to the first regional war in over 3 decades.

Promoting peace between Israel and its regional neighbors has been a priority for the United States since the end of World War II. Allowing for regional conditions to deteriorate to the point that Israeli security is threatened would constitute a major failing of American foreign policy and would seriously jeopardize many of the U.S. most important objectives in the region.

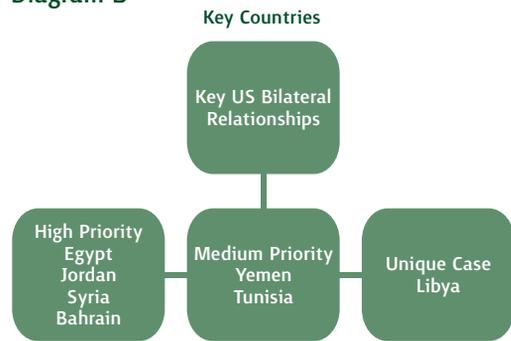
Part III: Creating Conditions for a Positive End-State

The strategic interests of the United States are now in a very precarious position. Middle Eastern countries, and especially those undergoing transition, face a number of serious threats that could jeopardize their security and stability and plunge the region into turmoil. In order to secure a positive end-state for the region, the United States and like-minded regional allies must work together to create the necessary security, political, and economic conditions for success.

Most importantly, as the U.S. by necessity must pursue a more resource-driven policy, choices must be made with care and foresight. Thinking regionally, while acting bilaterally seems unavoidable in order to achieve U.S. goals under the constraints it now faces.

In the following section, we list the key bilateral relationships the U.S. must build and hold to ensure that our vital interests are maintained. It is

Diagram B



also important for the U.S. to recognize the ways in which regional states are interconnected and that the failure to ensure stability in one can easily lead to chaos in another. Thus, the following list indicates the priority of each state to ensuring that U.S. regional strategic objectives are attained.

High Priority

Egypt. Egypt has long been the largest recipient of U.S. aid and funding in the Arab World and for good reason. Egypt holds the primary strategic position among Middle Eastern countries because of its proximity to Israel and the peace treaty that has prevailed for more than a generation, its geographical location straddling two continents and its control of the Suez Canal. A stable Egypt at peace with Israel that helps to maintain free shipping lanes and joins in the fight against terrorism is the single most crucial ally in maintaining U.S. interests among those countries in transition. A destabilized Egypt puts all American interests in the region at risk.

Jordan. Though Jordan lacks any significant natural resources, the country plays an important role in maintaining regional stability. It has provided a safe haven for hundreds of thousands of refugees from Palestine, Iraq and, now, Syria. It maintains a key peace treaty with Israel and is

actively involved in countering violent extremism. Moreover, it has made significant strides towards building a civil society and transitioning towards a more democratic form of government.

there exists a clear potential for a complete breakdown of order in the country

Yet, Jordan faces very serious threats to its stability. It is estimated that it will hold nearly 250,000 refugees from Syria as we enter 2013. Jordan's precarious finances and energy situation have prompted increased unrest with unprecedented public criticism of the government, including the King. Without a rapid and sustained infusion of billions of dollars of support from the outside world, it is not clear how the government will be able to continue to provide for its citizens as well as the refugee population. There exists a clear potential for a complete breakdown of order in the country. If that happens, a cornerstone of American foreign policy efforts in the region will be removed.

Syria. Horrific violence in Syria is continuing to spin out of control, claiming the lives of tens of thousands of civilians and forcing hundreds of thousands more out of their homes and into refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. The refugee problem is so severe in fact that some estimate that millions of refugees will be dispersed throughout the region as the conflict could continue indefinitely without resolution. Their presence in countries that are already facing significant refugee challenges could be a tipping point that forces a severe breakdown of law and order in the region. The refugee issue is no longer simply a humanitarian issue; it is now a strategic issue that threatens stability throughout the region.

If Syria continues to breakdown and destabilizing forces are allowed to use the chaos to cause trouble in the rest of the region, the influence of foreign powers like Russia and Iran would likely grow throughout the region. They would be able to provide more support to actors who seek to disrupt democratic transitions and slow economic growth, thereby further dividing an already fractured region.

Yet a stable and secure Syria could offer a whole range of possibilities for achieving U.S. interests in the future. Not only could it curb Iranian influence and weaken terrorist and jihadist groups like Hezbollah, but also it could ease pressures on regional allies like Jordan.

We consider the United States' most urgent and critical decisions in 2013 for U.S. long-term interests regarding Arab Springs must focus on Syria and Egypt.

Bahrain. As home to the 5th Fleet, Bahrain is the linchpin for U.S. energy and maritime security objectives in the Middle East and, in fact, for much of the world. U.S. naval presence there allows the U.S. to protect not only the world's largest oil field to the west, but also the entire Gulf region while ensuring freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, allowing oil to flow securely to world markets. It also will be the point from which the "pivot" to Asia will be most clearly manifested. A continued U.S. presence on Bahrain will be critical to ensuring that the sea-lanes between the Mediterranean and the Pacific Ocean remain open and secure. Furthermore, a stable Bahrain that is an active member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) can help ward off Iranian influence in the Gulf.

In securing our vital strategic interests in Bahrain, the U.S. appears to many to be trampling on our values of democracy and fair

representation. Some claim that our foreign policy of double standards is most clearly illustrated by our stance toward Bahrain. As we secure our interests, we must not forego our commitment to our values. Of all the dilemmas we face in dealing with the Arab Spring, searching for the right formula that will persuade and assist Bahrain in reconciliation is arguably the thorniest challenge to our diplomacy, but the stakes are high for the credibility of our values and principles.

Medium Priority

Yemen. Yemen is geographically located on the periphery of the core Arab states and, as such, is not as intimately linked to U.S. interests as states like Egypt and Jordan. However, Yemen's position at the Bab Al-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden makes its stability a crucially important factor in maintaining freedom of navigation as well as global energy security. Piracy remains a serious threat to commercial shipping in the area and transnational efforts have been required to contain it.

Additionally, Yemen is home to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and other jihadist groups that plot attacks against not only the United States, but also its key allies, especially Saudi Arabia. These groups have the potential to disrupt the ongoing transitions throughout the region and are a constant threat to any stability that might emerge in the coming years.

In the case of Yemen, defining success is seemingly impossible, but failure stares at us every day and would have far-reaching repercussions for U.S. interests and those of its allies. The GCC and the Friends of Yemen have played a constructive role in setting Yemen on a path to successful political transition, but recently more pressing issues elsewhere, including Syria and Iran, as well as resource constraints on many of the donor countries, have diverted attention

away from Yemen. U.S. leadership remains key in keeping Yemen high on everyone's radar, including and especially Saudi Arabia and the GCC.

Tunisia. The Arab Spring began in Tunisia in December of 2010. To many, Tunisia is the country with the best odds to transition to a stable democracy. The United States has dedicated more funds to civil society promotion in Tunisia than it has to any other country in the Arab Spring. Indeed, to many in the United States and abroad, Tunisia's ability to integrate Islamism, nationalism and state responsibility for economic policies to provide opportunities for its citizens will be the barometer of success for the Arab Spring.

Unique Case

Libya. Libya stands as a unique case among the major Arab countries in transition. It is the only one of these countries with significant deposits of oil and, as such, has the potential to harness these resources to rapidly build a successful and stable government. Yet, it remains true that a breakdown of the Libyan state would not directly jeopardize the majority of American interests in the region.

Instead, Libya remains critically important because it constitutes a key energy source for U.S. allies in Europe. Moreover, a stable and prosperous Libya could help to stem the tide of migrants from North Africa into Europe and help to promote economic integration and stability in the Trans-Sahel region.

In contrast, a weak and unstable Libya would only serve to exacerbate an already horrific crisis in the Sahel. It provides a porous border through which illegal weapons, human and drug trafficking occur.

While the U.S. initially assumed a limited role in assisting with Libya's transition

and instead looked to the UN, Arab allies and European states to offer guidance, recently there have been new efforts by the U.S. to increase our efforts with Libya. These should be sustained.

Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities

Western analysts and critics have largely misunderstood the Arab Spring. Until these various revolutions and uprisings are recognized as the unique – though interconnected – phenomena that they are, Western leaders and decision makers will continue to pursue ineffective policies in the region.

By examining the historical trajectory of Arab states, it is clear that these uprisings are yet another in a series of calls by the peoples of this region to be governed by legitimate authorities. While no single group has yet been able to effectively take up that mantle in any of the transitioning countries, it is clear that whoever does will employ an ideological mix of Islamism, nationalism and state responsibility for economic policies.

It is also clear that these transitions may well take decades to reach their end-states. The road ahead will likely be chaotic and unstable. Given that these transitions will be unique from each other, but also intimately interconnected, it is our view that the most effective approach for the United States will be to think regionally, but act bilaterally. With a new administration in 2013, now is the time to reshape American objectives, strategies and policies based on this approach, clearly articulating to each country what the U.S. seek as they move down uncharted paths of their own. **PRISM**

Notes

¹ See Cleveland, William L., *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), 89-100.

² *Ibid.*, 161.

³ BP Statistical Review of World Energy, June 2012, available at <http://www.bp.com/assets/bp_internet/globalbp/globalbp_uk_english/reports_and_publications/statistical_energy_review_2011/STAGING/local_assets/pdf/statistical_review_of_world_energy_full_report_2012.pdf>.

⁴ "The New Grease?" *The Economist*. March 10, 2012. Accessed November 19, 2012, at <<http://www.economist.com/node/21549949>>.

⁵ "Energy for the Warfighter," *Operational Energy Strategy DoD*. March 1, 2011.

⁶ BP Statistical Review, *op. cit.*, 24.

⁷ "U.S. Energy Information Administration – EIA – Independent Statistics and Analysis." *U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)*. Accessed November 19, 2012, at <<http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=WOTC>>.

⁸ "Maritime Security and Navigation," *U.S. Department of State*. Accessed November 19, 2012, at <<http://www.state.gov/e/oes/ocns/opa/maritimesecurity/index.htm>>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *World Economic Situations and Prospects 2012*. UN Report, available at <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wesp/wesp_current/2012chap2.pdf>.