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The Arab Spring, U.S. Foreign Policy, and the Question of Democracy in the Middle East

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THE ARAB SPRING, U.S. FOREIGN POLICY, AND THE QUESTION OF DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Shortly after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, Aluf Benn, the editor-in-chief of *Haaretz*, wrote a column titled "Mubarak's departure thwarted Israeli strike on Iran."[1] His argument was that the Arab Spring had fundamentally transformed the geopolitics of the Middle East ushering "in a new era of uncertainty for the entire region, and for Israel in particular."[2] His observation is an astute one as it both draws attention to linkages between different conflicts in the Middle East as well as highlighting how the spread of democracy has forced a reassessment of national security priorities by countries across the region.

The Arab Spring has also overturned a binary and simplistic view of the political divisions in the Middle East. Long-standing assumptions about a regional order defined by a pro-Western "moderate Arab" and Israeli bloc versus an anti-Western axis comprised of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah/Hamas is analytically distorting today. What the Arab Spring has done is help clarify what Middle East scholars have known for a long time—that the fundamental political chasm in the Middle East that shapes internal politics is not between pro-Western and anti-Western forces nor is it between Shia and Sunni or Arab and Jew, but rather it is the enormous gulf that separates longstanding authoritarian regimes from the people they rule over.

The principle near-term consequence of the Arab Spring, therefore, is that for the first time a new global spotlight is being directed at dictatorial regimes. Those countries that have yet to experience a democratic revolt are now scrambling to buy off popular discontent with salary increases, new state subsidy packages, and promises of political reform.[3] Simultaneously, a new global recognition has been given to democratic movements and the aspirations of millions of Arab and Muslims who seek *hurriya* (political freedom), *adala ijtima'iyya* (social justice), and *karama* (dignity). Prior to the Arab Spring, it was long assumed that the voice

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1. Aluf Benn, *Mubarak's Departure Thwarted Israeli Strike on Iran*, HAARETZ (Feb. 13, 2011, 1:27 AM), http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/mubarak-s-departure-thwarted-israeli-strike-on-iran-1.343012.

2. *Id.*

3. *See* Toby C. Jones, *Saudi Arabia's Regional Reaction*, THE NATION (Aug. 24, 2011), http://www.thenation.com/article/162962/saudi-arabias-regional-reaction.

of people of the region did not matter in terms of Western policy.[4] There was a tacit and widespread assumption that this voice was too fractured, too politically immature, or too radical to be taken seriously.

Similarly, there was an erroneous assumption that the Arab authoritarian order was there to stay. In the same way that a decade ago longstanding dictators in Jordan, Morocco, and Syria passed on their political thrones to their sons, it was widely thought (and in some political circles hoped) that the same process would follow in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and beyond. This assumption no longer applies, as a new generation of Arabs and Muslims have come of age and are politically asserting themselves. The old political order is gradually receding and a new one is emerging on the horizon where the theme of democracy is now at the center of the politics of the region. Where does U.S. foreign policy fit into this picture?

Like the rest of world, the Obama Administration was caught off guard by the Arab Spring. Its initial reaction toward the Egyptian revolt suggested as much. Secretary of State Clinton claimed in the early days of the protests that "[o]ur assessment is the Egyptian government is stable"[5] while Vice President Biden, echoing a comment by President Obama two years earlier, affirmed that "I would not refer to [Mubarak] as a dictator."[6] Yet two weeks later President Obama, along with most of the world, was hailing the Egyptian revolution and praising the democratic aspirations of the Tahrir Square protesters as a manifestation of longstanding American principles and values.[7]

Praise for the Arab Spring by the Obama Administration has been a consistent theme of his presidency since that moment. This praise has also largely enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress. These recent public statements by senior American politicians in support of democracy in Middle East, however, ignore longstanding U.S. policy where political stability was preferred over parliamentary democracy. Stability was a code word for support for authoritarian regimes that protected U.S. interests from hostile forces emerging from within and outside the region. In this article, I seek to provide a brief overview of this forgotten history that substantively begins after World War II when the U.S. emerged as a global superpower and continued until the 2011 Arab Spring. I also wish to comment on

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4. *See* Rami G.Khouri, *The Arab Awakening*, THE NATION (Aug. 24, 2011), http://www.thenation.com/article/162973/arab-awakening.

5. *US Urges Restraint in Egypt, Says Government Stable*, REUTERS (Jan. 25, 2012, 5:56 PM), http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/25/us-egypt-protest-clinton-idUSTRE70O7RC20110125.

6. *Mubarak is Not a Dictator but People Have the Right to Protest*, PBS: NEWSHOUR (Jan. 27, 2011), http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june11/biden_01-27.html. Prior to his visit to Egypt in 2009 to deliver his famous lecture on US-Islamic relations, President Obama was asked if he considered Mubarak an authoritarian leader. He replied: "No, I tend not to use labels for folks. I haven't met him; I've spoken to him on the phone. He has been a stalwart ally, in many respects, to the United States. He has sustained peace with Israel, which is a very difficult thing to do in that region." *See* Press Release, The White House, Interview of the President by Justin Webb, BBC (June 1, 2009), http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Transcript-of-the-Interview-of-the-President-with-Justin-Webb-BBC-6-1-09.

7. Barack Obama, President of the United States, Remarks by the President on Egypt (Feb. 11, 2011), *available at* http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/11/remarks-president-egypt.

the emerging challenges to U.S. interests in the region, with a focus on the implications for Israel that flow from the spread of democracy in the region.

I. U.S. OPPOSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: TWO POST-9/11 EVENTS

Evidence of U.S. opposition to democracy in the Middle East was on display on several occasions after September 11, 2001. The terror attacks that killed 3,000 people in New York and Washington, D.C. traumatized the United States and became the defining issue for the contemporary generation of American citizens. As a consequence it forced a re-examination of U.S. policy toward the Muslim world in general and the Arab Middle East in particular. The American public, along with leading members of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, were trying to make sense of what had happened. What had gone wrong, why do they hate us, and what was the new way forward in terms of U.S. policy toward the Middle East? In a famous speech in November 2003, President Bush, reflecting on past U.S. policy toward the region drew a direct link between American support for dictatorial regimes, violence, and the question of democracy:

> Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe – because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export.[8]

The phrase "stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty" is an indirect way of acknowledging two important facts: (1) that for 60 years the U.S. has been supporting authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and (2) this policy had come back to haunt the United States. As *The 9/11 Commission Report* acknowledged, "[o]ne of the lessons of the long Cold War was that short-term gains in cooperating with the most repressive and brutal governments were too often outweighed by long-term setbacks for America's stature and interests."[9] The purported political stability that was assumed to accompany this policy was no longer guaranteed and a new grand strategy toward the Muslim world was needed, one which President Bush described as "a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East."[10] The following table, produced by *The Economist*, lays out the

8. George W. Bush, President of the United States, Remarks by President George W. Bush at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy (Nov. 6, 2003), *available at* http://www.ned.org/george-w-bush/remarks-by-president-george-w-bush-at-the-20th-anniversary. The fact that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers on September 11, 2001 came from one country, Saudi Arabia, confirms the linkage between political despotism and violence.

9. NAT'L COMM'N OF TERRORIST ATTACKS, THE 9/11 COMMISSION REPORT: FINAL REPORT ON NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES, 376 (2004).

10. George W. Bush, *supra* note 8.

problem.[11] Note the connection between the low democracy rankings of the listed countries and their close relations with the United States.

In the bottom division

Arab League*

Overall democracy ranking out of 167 countries

Lebanon	86	Egypt	138
Palestinian Territories	93	Oman	143
Iraq	111	Tunisia	144
Kuwait	114	Yemen	146
Mauritania	115	United Arab Emirates	148
Morocco	116	Sudan	151
Jordan	117	Syria	152
Bahrain	122	Djibouti	154
Algeria	125	Libya	158
Comoros	127	Saudi Arabia	160
Qatar	137		

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit, Democracy Index 2010, to be issued on December 8th *Somalia not ranked

In May 2003, a second revealing event took place that laid the bare the tension and contradictions between U.S. values and interests in the Middle East. Careful scrutiny of what transpired helps understand why in the past the U.S. has preferred authoritarian regimes in the Middle East to democratic ones, and why a transition to a new policy after the Arab Spring will be difficult for any U.S. administration.

In the lead-up to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Bush Administration was hoping to open a second battlefront into Iraq from the north, across the Turkish-Iraqi border. The newly elected government in Turkey was subjected to considerable pressure from Washington to acquiesce to this request, including as an incentive a USD $32 billion dollar aid package that was desperately needed to bolster a sagging Turkish economy.[12] While initially Ankara seemed to be receptive to the offer, Turkish public opinion was strongly opposed to any role Turkey might play in the invasion of Iraq (about 90 percent of the Turkish public strongly opposed Turkish involvement in the invasion of Iraq).[13] After an extensive public debate in the media and in parliament, the Turkish government, bowing to overwhelming public sentiment, refused the American request.

After the toppling of Saddam in March 2003, Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz traveled to Turkey. In a famous interview on CNN-Turk, he publicly criticized the Turkish government for its non-cooperation in the invasion of Iraq and then he stated "[l]ets [sic] have a Turkey that steps up and says we made a

11. ECONOMIST INTELLIGENCE UNIT, DEMOCRACY INDEX 2010: DEMOCRACY IN RETREAT 5-7 (2012), *available at* http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy_Index_2010_web.pdf.

12. Dexter Filkins & Eric Schmitt, *Turkey Demands $32 Billion U.S. Aid Package if It Is to Take Part in a War on Iraq*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 19, 2003, at A15.

13. Nasuh Uslu et al., *Turkish Public Opinion Toward the United States In the Context of the Iraq Question*, MIDDLE E. REV. OF INT'L AFF., Sept. 2005, at 75, 76.

mistake."[14] Wolfowitz then added a revealing comment that he wished the Turkish military would have stepped forward and played a more prominent role in shaping Turkish foreign policy in the lead-up to the war.

> I think for whatever reason they did not play the strong leadership role on that issue that we would have expected . . . . [A]ll I'm saying is that when you had a[n] issue of Turkey's national interest and national strategy I think it's perfectly appropriate, especially in your system, for the military to say it was in Turkey's interest to support the United States in that effort.[15]

These controversial comments unleashed a furious debate in Turkey. Wolfowitz's desire that the Turkish military play a more prominent role in politics was shocking in light of modern Turkish history. At the time, Turkey was just emerging from a long period of authoritarian rule dominated by the intrusive role of the armed forces that had toppled four civilian governments, most recently in 1997. One year earlier, in 2002, Turkey's freest and most inclusive election took place bringing the Justice and Development Party to power.[16] While Wolfowitz's statement was shocking from a political development perspective, it was completely understandable from a U.S. foreign policy point of view. As this case amply demonstrates, it is much easier for the U.S. to deal with military regimes than with democratic parliaments who reflect the will of the people. One can project forward and imagine the complications and difficulties that might arise if Washington has to deal with democratically-elected governments across the region in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman instead of the pro-Western monarchies and family dictatorships that are currently in power.

This example establishes a key principle that has long guided U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Greater democracy does not always translate into greater support for U.S. geo-strategic interests in the region. There is often a chasm between popular indigenous nationalist sentiments on key geo-strategic issues versus the foreign policy preferences of the United States. In this context Tamara Coffman Wittes has correctly observed that the

> broad problem that haunts American democratization efforts is that . . . [the] general preference for democratic politics has long been tempered, in regard to the Arab world, by the knowledge that the victors of a democratic process in most Arab countries are unlikely to be the parties who share America's policy preferences in the region.[17]

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14. Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfwitz, Interview with CNN Turk (May 6, 2003) (transcript on file with U.S. Dep't of Def.), *available at* http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2572.

15. *Id.*

16. *See* Soner Cagaptay, *The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era*, MIDDLE E. REV. OF INT'L AFF., Dec. 2002, at 42.

17. TAMARA COFMAN WITTES, FREEDOM'S UNSTEADY MARCH: AMERICA'S ROLE IN BUILDING ARAB DEMOCRACY 21 (2008). Another example of the clash between U.S. interests in the Middle East

In other words, as former Secretary of State Madeline Albright once observed, "Arab public opinion, after all, can be rather scary."[18]

II. THE LONGER HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON DEMOCRACY AND U.S. POLICY

Prior to September 11, 2001, theoretical discussion on the impact of foreign intervention in promoting democratization in the Middle East was limited in the academic literature. If it was seriously discussed at all views were polarized. This polarity is best captured by William Quandt's observation that "it is unfair to say that American policy has been consistently hostile to democratic movements *per se* in the Middle East"[19] versus that of the editors of the *Middle East Report* who maintain that "in its 20th century engagement with the Middle East, Washington has consistently opposed and subverted those forces pursuing any measure of a democratic program."[20] It is a premise of this article that the bulk of the empirical evidence lies with the second claim.

The broader U.S. strategic position on the topic has been that as long as there was no immediate clash between U.S. interests and democracy; U.S. policy could support democratization processes and movements, albeit cautiously. The case of contemporary Turkey illustrates this point. During the 20th century, the United States supported the democratization of Turkey. Efforts to expand and deepen democracy in Turkey to include even religious-based political parties with an Islamist past were not opposed by the U.S. In fact, Turkey has repeatedly been praised by both Republican and Democratic Administrations as a role model for the rest of the Islamic world—one which the U.S. would like to see replicated in other Muslim majority societies. This support for democracy, however, was always conditional. Hypothetically speaking, if during this period a democratically elected Turkish parliament would have voted to withdraw from NATO, close down the U.S. military base in Incirlik, and sever relations with Israel, American support and enthusiasm for Turkish democracy would have rapidly abated. Recent tensions in U.S.-Turkish relations suggest as much.

During the first decade of the 21st century, Turkey experienced a steady process of democratization but not without controversies and setbacks.[21] As

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and greater democracy was on display when it was revealed that the Bush Administration was contemplating bombing Al Jazeera in Qatar because of its reporting on the Iraqi insurgency and the negative effects with was having on the US occupation of Iraq. David Leigh & Richard Norton-Taylor, *MPs Leaked Bush Plan to Hit al-Jazeera*, THE GUARDIAN (Jan. 9, 2006), http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/jan/09/Iraqandthemedia.politicsandiraq.

18. Madeleine K. Albright, *Bridges, Bombs or Bluster?*, FOREIGN AFF., Sept.-Oct. 2003, at 2, 13.

19. Rex Brynen et al., *Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives on Arab Liberalization and Democratization*, *in* POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE ARAB WORLD 3, 19 (Rex Brynen et al. eds., 1995) (citations and internal quotations omitted).

20. *Id.*

21. *See* Howard Eissenstat, *Turkey's General Resign*, INFORMED COMMENT: THOUGHTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST HISTORY AND RELIGION (Feb. 2, 2011), http://www.juancole.com/2011/08/eissenstat-turkeys-generals-resign.html. *See also* Aliza Marcus, *The Historical Blindness of Turkey's Detractors*, FOREIGN POLICY (Nov. 24, 2010), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/24/the_historical_blindness_of_turkeys_detractors?page=full.

Turkey democratizes, the government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, responding to public pressure, has become outspoken on the question of Palestinian suffering. Given that the plight of the Palestinians is a key marker of identity for many Arabs and Muslims, politicians increase their profile and popularity by speaking out on the topic.[22]

Following the 2008-2009 Israeli war in Gaza, there has been a noticeable rhetorical shift in Turkish foreign policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict. Turkish-Israeli relations reached a nadir in May 2010 when the Israeli Navy tried to stop an international aid flotilla to Gaza. Nine Turkish civilians were killed in the raid, which lead to a major international crisis, a special UN investigative report, and the rupturing of Turkish-Israel relations.[23] The mainstream U.S. foreign policy analysis of these events was revealing.

Reporting on growing Turkish assertiveness in the Middle East and the anxiety it was creating in Washington, the *New York Times* published an insightful article titled "Turkey Goes from Reliable Ally to Thorn for U.S."

> Turkey is seen increasingly in Washington as "running around the region doing things that are at cross-purposes to what the big powers in the region want," said Steven A. Cook, a scholar with the Council on Foreign Relations. The question being asked, he said, is "How do we keep the Turks in their lane?"[24]

According to a senior administration official, "[t]he president has said to Erdogan that some of the actions that Turkey has taken have caused questions to be raised on the Hill [Congress] . . . about whether we can have confidence in Turkey as an ally."[25] He added, "[the Turks] need to show that they take seriously American national security interests."[26] A new assertive Turkish foreign policy, in part buttressed by its democratization process, is clearly becoming a problem for U.S. foreign policy.

The tension between U.S. policy and democracy in the Middle East was further exposed a few years earlier in the West Bank and Gaza. In 2006, Palestinian legislative council elections were held with full U.S. support and monitoring by international observers. Jimmy Carter, in conjunction with the National Democratic Institute, sent a team that verified that the electoral process was free and fair.[27] When it was announced that Hamas had won a solid and

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22. Nader Hashemi, *Revisiting Erskine Childers' Thesis on the 'Broken Triangle': Why Palestine is Central to Resolving Islam-West Relations*, *in* ISLAM-WEST RELATIONS: TOWARD A CIVILIZED DIALOGUE (Nigel Dingwall ed.) (forthcoming) (manuscript at 11-13).

23. Mark Landler, *Israel Faces Deepening Tensions With Turkey Over Raid, and Bond With U.S. Frays*, N.Y. TIMES, June 4, 2010, at A7.

24. Sabrina Tavernise & Michael Slackman, *Turkey Goes from Pliable Ally to Thorn for U.S.*, N.Y. TIMES, June 8, 2010, at A10.

25. Daniel Dombey, *US Warns Turkey on Iran and Israel*, FIN. TIMES (Aug. 15, 2010, 11:05 PM), http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/35d01e4e-a895-11df-86dd-00144feabdc0.html#axzz28NT2gBYx.

26. *Id.*

27. STAFF OF S. COMM. ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, 109TH CONG., PALESTINE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS – CHALLENGES OF HAMAS' VICTORY 18 (Comm. Print 2006).

surprising victory, U.S. support for these elections, which were arguably the freest elections in history of the Arab world, quickly soured and the Bush Administration tried to covertly subvert them.[28] The lesson here is clear. From the perspective of U.S. foreign policy, democracy was acceptable as long as the results worked in favor of securing American strategic interests in the region. If the elections did not, then democracy was a problem.

III. WHAT ARE WESTERN STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

Historically, the Middle East's strategic value lay in its geographic importance linking the continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa. The region was of particular interest to the British because it was a conduit on the way to India, the jewel in the crown of their empire. The importance of the Middle East changed significantly, however, in 1907 when oil was discovered in Iran, leading the British navy on the eve of World War I to switch from coal to oil as its primary energy source.

After World War II, the United States gradually replaced Britain (and to a lesser degree, France) as the dominant external power in the region, which effectively transformed the Persian Gulf from a British to an "American lake."[29] During the Cold War, there was serious concern in the United States about Soviet penetration in the Middle East, which the 1979 Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan amplified. It is debatable, however, how big of a threat the Soviets actually posed to U.S. interests in the region. A post World War II *modus vivendi*, or unwritten understanding, existed between Moscow and Washington that the Middle East, particularly its vast energy reserves, was to be a Western sphere of influence. This is not to deny that the Soviet Union did not try to exploit opportunities to expand its influence. In the early 1950s, for example, after the U.S. refusal to sell arms to Egypt, Nasser turned to the Soviet Union for support.[30] The main external influences in the region, however, for most of the second half of the 20th century have always been American and to a lesser extent British. This partly explains why these governments led the coalition in the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq invasion and occupation.

During the height of the turmoil engendered by the Iranian Revolution in 1979, then National Security Advisor Brzezinski coined the term the "arc of crisis."[31] His reference was to the Middle East, or as he described it, that part of

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28. David Rose, *The Gaza Bombshell*, VANITY FAIR (Apr. 2008), http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/04/gaza200804.

29. DANA H. ALLIN & STEVEN SIMON, THE SIXTH CRISIS: IRAN, ISRAEL, AMERICA AND THE RUMORS OF WAR 96 (2010).

30. GALIA GOLAN, SOVIET POLICIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST: FROM WORLD WAR II TO GORBACHEV 45 (1990); Rashid Khalidi, *The Superpowers and the Cold War in the Middle East*, *in* THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE UNITED STATES: HISTORY, POLITICS, AND IDEOLOGIES 157, 165-66 (David W. Lesch & Mark L. Haas eds., 2012).

31. Steve R. Weisman, *The Middle Thicket*, N.Y. TIMES (May 27, 2003), http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/27/world/the-mideast-thicket.html?n=Top%2fReference%2fTimes%20Topics%2fSubjects%2fT%2fTerrorism.

the globe which "stretches along the shores of the Indian Ocean, with fragile social and political structures in a region of vital importance to us threatened with fragmentation. The resulting political chaos could well be filled by elements hostile to our values and sympathetic to our adversaries."[32] It is in this region that two priorities intersect: oil and the state of Israel.

In writing about American interests in the Middle East, William Quandt, a leading mainstream Middle East scholar and former member of the National Security Council in the Nixon and Carter Administrations, observed that "three concerns—oil, Israel, and the Soviet Union—were the driving forces behind American Middle East policy throughout most of the period from the 1950s through the 1980s."[33] In terms of oil, it is common knowledge that the vast energy reserves (two-thirds of the world's total) located in the Saudi peninsula in particular are a major concern of the United States.[34]

The U.S. State Department has described the region as "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history, probably the richest economic prize in the world in the field of foreign investment,"[35] or in President Eisenhower's words, the most "strategically important area in the world."[36] While these quotes are from the 1940s and 1950s, they have been reaffirmed continuously by high-ranking American officials and by internal U.S. government documents. Writing about the Middle East, Richard Nixon stated that "its oil is the lifeblood of modern industry, the Persian Gulf region is the heart that pumps it, and the sea routes around the Gulf are the jugular vein through which that lifeblood passes."[37] In a subsequent book, Nixon argued that because the Middle East is likely to remain "the only source of significant exportable oil in the world for the next twenty-five years—we have no choice but to remain engaged in the area."[38] Furthermore, in explaining the U.S. rationale for maintaining a military presence in the Gulf, then Secretary of Defense Cheney stated in 1991 that

> given the enormous resources that exist in that part of the world, and given the fact that those resources are in decline elsewhere, the value of

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32. *The Crescent of Crisis: Iran and a Region of Rising Instability*, TIME, Jan 15, 1979, at 18.

33. William B. Quandt, *American Policy toward Democratic Political Movements in the Middle East*, *in* RULE AND RIGHTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: DEMOCRACY, LAW, AND SOCIETY 165 (Ellis Goldberg et al. eds., 1993).

34. The Middle East is also home to about 40 percent of the world's natural gas reserves as well. *BP Statistical Review of World Energy*, BP.COM/STATISTICALREVIEW (June 2012), 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.

35. NOAM CHOMSKY, WORLD ORDERS: OLD AND NEW 190 (1994) (internal quotations omitted).

36. *Id.* (internal quotations omitted).

37. RICHARD NIXON, THE REAL WAR 74 (1980).

38. RICHARD NIXON, SEIZE THE MOMENT: AMERICA'S CHALLENGE IN A ONE-SUPERPOWER WORLD 214 (1992). Released British government documents in 2004 confirm this view. They revealed that the U.S. government was considering seizing the Saudi and Kuwaiti oil fields in 1973 in response to the Arab oil embargo. *See* Paul Reynolds, *U.S. Ready to Seize Gulf Oil in 1973*, BBC NEWS (Jan. 2, 2004, 8:01 AM), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3333995.stm.

> those resources is only going to rise in the years ahead, and the United States and our major partners cannot afford to have those resources controlled by somebody who is fundamentally hostile to our interests.[39]

During the Cold War, as in other parts of the developing world, U.S. interests in the Middle East were challenged by independent Third World nationalism, in both its secular and religious variants. Originally, this manifested itself in the form of Arab and Iranian nationalism, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser and Mohammad Mossadeq. More recently, various forms of religious nationalism, otherwise known as political Islam, specifically its mainstream variant, have posed a challenge to American interests in the Arab-Islamic world. Quoting from the U.S. State Department internal record, Gabriel Kolko observed that as early as 1950 it was explicitly acknowledged that "[t]he main risk to the West [in the Middle East] came from 'ultra-nationalist elements.'"[40]

In 1958, President Eisenhower told Vice President Nixon that the trouble we are facing in the Middle East is that "we have a campaign of hatred against us, not by the [Arab] governments but by the people. The people are on Nasser's side."[41] According to a National Security Council report at the time, the reason why the United States was viewed negatively was because in

> the eyes of the majority of Arabs the United States appears to be opposed to the realization of the goals of Arab nationalism. They believe that the United States is seeking to protect its interest in Near East oil by supporting the status quo and opposing political or economic progress.[42]

This report went on to note that the

> principal points of difficulty . . . are: the Arab-Israeli dispute; Arab aspirations for self-determination and unity; widespread belief that the United States desires to keep the Arab world disunited and is committed to work with "reactionary" elements to that end; the Arab attitude toward the East-West struggle; U.S. support of its Western "colonial" allies; and problems of trade and economic development.[43]

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39. Richard Cheney, *The Gulf War: A First Assessment*, *in* THE SOREF SYMPOSIUM: AMERICAN STRATEGY AFTER THE GULF WAR 53-54 (Yehudah Mirsky ed., 1991).

40. GABRIEL KOLKO, CONFRONTING THE THIRD WORLD: UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY, 1945-1980 70 (1988). The architect of President Carter's Rapid Deployment Force in the Middle East, Robert Komer, in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, acknowledged the central US concern in the region was not a Soviet attack but, according to Melvyn Leffler, the real concern was to "deal with indigenous and regional unrest within the Persian Gulf region." Melvyn P. Leffler, *From the Truman Doctrine to the Carter Doctrine: Lessons and Dilemmas of the Cold War*, 7 DIPLOMATIC HISTORY 245, 259 (1983).

41. SALIM YAQUB, CONTAINING ARAB NATIONALISM: THE EISENHOWER DOCTRINE AND THE MIDDLE EAST 228 (2004).

42. Nat'l Sec. Council, *Note by the Executive Secretary to the National Security Council on Long-Range U.S. Policy Toward the Near East*, ¶ 2, NSC Doc. 5801/1 (Jan. 24, 1958), *available at* http://www.history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d5.

43. *Id.*

The issues of oil, Israel, independent indigenous nationalism, and the United States intersect at a regional level by virtue of the U.S. decision to adopt Israel as a regional ally to protect Western interests. In 1958, the National Security Council proposed that a "logical corollary" against those who opposed American interests "would be to support Israel as the only strong pro-Western power left in the Middle East."[44] At this time, it was Nasser who inspired the pan-Arab nationalism that was threatening the stability and legitimacy of the pro-British and pro-American oil-producing regimes.[45]

The British cabinet's Eastern Committee after World War I was to accurately characterize these regimes as an "Arab Facade."[46] Lord Curzon, the British foreign secretary at the time, described these countries as being "ruled and administered under British guidance and controlled by a native Mohammedan, and, as far as possible, by an Arab staff."[47] These weak monarchies and authoritarian regimes would remain in power "veiled by constitutional fictions, as a protectorate, a sphere of influence, a buffer State, and so on."[48]

In America's strategic conception of the Middle East, Israel's role is that of a regional power, preserving stability (read: American hegemony) in the region. The tacit alliance between the U.S., Israel, and the "Arab Facade" was publicly acknowledged in 1973 by the Senate's leading oil expert, Senator Henry Jackson, who spoke in Congress about

> "the strength and Western orientation of Israel on the Mediterranean and Iran [under the Shah] on the Persian Gulf," two "reliable friends of the United States," who, along with Saudi Arabia, "have served to inhibit and contain those irresponsible and radical elements in certain Arab states . . . who, were they free to do so, would pose a grave threat indeed to our principal sources of petroleum in the Persian Gulf."[49]

After the Cold War, Israel's strategic function remained the same.

This was confirmed in unambiguous terms by the former head of Israeli military intelligence, General Shlomo Gazit. Writing in *Yediot Ahronot* he stated

> Israel's main task has not changed at all, and it remains of crucial importance. Its location at the centre of the Arab-Muslim Middle East predestines Israel to be a devoted guardian of stability in all the countries surrounding it. Its [role] is to protect the existing regimes: to prevent or halt the processes of radicalisation, and to block the expansion of fundamentalist religious zealotry.[50]

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44. CHOMSKY, *supra* note 35, at 204.

45. *Id.* at 201-02.

46. WILLIAM STIVERS, SUPREMACY AND OIL: IRAQ, TURKEY, AND THE ANGLO-AMERICAN WORLD ORDER, 1918-1930 28 (1982).

47. *Id.* at 28-29.

48. *Id.* at 34.

49. NOAM CHOMSKY, DETERRING DEMOCRACY 55 (1992).

50. Israel Shahak, *How Israel's Strategy Favours Iraq over Iran*, MIDDLE E. INT'L, Mar. 19, 1993, at 19, 20.

Scholars from the Dependency School of political development (i.e., on the Left) maintain that what follows from these facts is that any movement toward democratization of the Middle East poses a threat to U.S. interests in the area. This is because democratic forces will refuse to play an accommodative or subordinate role to Western foreign policy interests. In this context Gudrun Krämer has noted that

> the deep resentment of foreign intervention and Israeli policies among Arab nationalists and Islamist activists, even limited liberalization increases opposition to pro-Western policies . . . More liberal regimes in the Arab World, therefore, are likely to be less accommodating regarding Western economic and strategic interests than authoritarian regimes that do not openly challenge the regional balance of power.[51]

The United States historically has opposed democracy in the region because "it is much simpler to manipulate a few ruling families—to secure fat orders for arms and ensure that oil price remains low—than a wide variety of personalities and policies bound to be thrown up by a democratic system," observes the veteran Middle East journalist Dilip Hiro.[52] Reflecting on British policy in the Middle East, "Prime Minister Harold Macmillan found it 'rather sad that circumstances compel us to support reactionary and really rather outmoded regimes because we know that the new forces, even if they begin with moderate opinions, always seem to drift in violent revolutionary and strongly anti-Western positions.'"[53] Former Secretary of Defense and CIA chief James Schlesinger concurs with this observation. He once asked a congressional committee

> whether we seriously desire to prescribe democracy as the proper form of government for other societies. Perhaps this issue is most clearly posed in the Islamic world. Do we seriously want to change the institutions of Saudi Arabia? The brief answer is no; over the years we have sought to preserve those institutions, sometimes in preference to more democratic forces coursing throughout the region.[54]

Over the years this policy of opposing democratization in the Middle East has enjoyed wide support among segments of the liberal intelligentsia in the United States. For example, commenting on the CIA coup in 1953 that overthrow the prime minister of Iran, Muhammad Mossadeq, and the nascent democratic experiment that was emerging, the *New York Times* editorialized on the lessons that should be learned from this event:

> Underdeveloped countries with rich resources now have an object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid by one of their number which goes berserk with fanatical nationalism. It is perhaps too much to hope

51. Gudrun Krämer, *Liberalization and Democracy in the Arab World*, MIDDLE E. R., Jan.-Feb. 1992, at 35.

52. CHOMSKY, *supra* note 35, at 198.

53. *Id.* at 199.

54. Yahya Sadowski, *The New Orientalism and Democracy Debate*, MIDDLE E. R., July-Aug. 1993, at 14.

> that Iran's experience will prevent the rise of Mossadeghs in other countries, but that experience may at least strengthen the hands of the more reasonable and far-seeing leaders.[55]

While this quotation is from 1953, it is debatable whether there has been a qualitative and substantive change on this topic over the years among members of America's foreign policy establishment. For example, writing in the summer of 2011, after the start of the Arab Spring, Aaron David Miller, a liberal intellectual, Middle East analyst, and advisor to six American Secretaries of State, wrote that the "growing influence of Arab public opinion on the actions of Arab governments and the absence of strong leaders will make it much tougher for the United States to pursue its traditional policies. For America, the Arab Spring may well prove to be more an Arab Winter."[56] He went on to note that

> as public opinion becomes more influential in shaping domestic and foreign policies in the Arab countries, the space available for U.S. policies and influence may contract. The acquiescent autocrats have acquiesced, albeit often grudgingly, in our approach to Iran, Gaza, Israel, and counterterrorism. The new regimes won't, or at least not as easily. Since most of our policies won't change quickly, or at all, the United States will likely be in for a rough ride, with both emerging governments and old ones.[57]

Similarly, Wesley Clark, former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO and Democratic Party presidential candidate, reflected a similar concern about the consequences of the Arab Spring for U.S. foreign policy. "In Tunisia, Egypt and Libya," he observed, "strong Islamic sentiments have inevitably surfaced despite the democratic and Western-oriented facade of the initial Arab Spring uprisings. The future orientation of these states is likely to be less helpful to U.S. aims and policies in the region than their predecessors."[58] These observations have special relevance for the future of Israel in the Middle East.

IV. THE ARAB SPRING AND ISRAEL

The spread of democratic rebellions across the Arab world was not welcomed by Israel.[59] The influential Israeli historian Benny Morris blamed Islam for the Arab Spring "which gradually eroded secularism and brought down pragmatic,

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55. Editorial, *The Iranian Accord*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 6, 1954, at 16, *available at* ProQuest Doc. No. 113065530.

56. Aaron David Miller, *For America, an Arab Winter*, WILSON Q., Summer 2011, at 38.

57. *Id.* at 42.

58. Wesley Clark, *Why US Shouldn't Rush to War in Syria*, CNNOPINION (March 9, 2012, 12:34 PM), http://www.cnn.com/2012/03/08/opinion/clark-syria-intervention/index.html?hpt=hp_c2.

59. Douglas Hamilton, *Israel Shocked by Obama's 'Betrayal' of Mubarak*, REUTERS (Jan. 31, 2011, 12:54 PM), http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/31/us-egypt-israel-usa-idUSTRE70U537201 10131; *see also* Mohammed Ayoob, *The Arab Spring: Its Geostrategic Significance*, MIDDLE E. POL'Y, Fall 2012, at 87-89 (providing a serious analysis of these events).

prudent governments in the region."[60] Prime Minister Netanyahu has described the Arab Spring as an "Islamic, anti-Western, anti-liberal, anti-Israeli and anti-democratic wave."[61] He initially, however, instructed his Cabinet to remain silent on the issue out fear of inflaming an uncertain situation. But instructions were subsequently given to Israeli ambassadors in key capitals to emphasize Egyptian stability as the revolution unfolded. President Shimon Peres, who was not bound by these restrictions, stated that "[w]e always have had and still have great respect for President Mubarak. . . . I don't say everything that he did was right, but he did one thing which all of us are thankful to him for: he kept the peace in the Middle East."[62] Reportedly Israel offered Mubarak asylum and the Israeli government was lobbying the Obama Administration on his behalf until his final days.[63]

Israel's concerns about the Arab Spring are understandable. The spread of democracy in the region fundamentally and qualitatively undermines Israel's national security strategy, which similar to U.S. foreign policy goals, was predicated on the survival of pro-Western authoritarian regimes. The problem with this strategy, however, is that from the very beginning it was based on the faulty assumption that the voice of the people did not matter in policy-making and that these regimes would be around forever. This point is best exemplified by Egyptian-Israeli relations.

It is often stated that for the last thirty-three years, Egypt and Israel have had a peace treaty. This is a misleading characterization of the 1979 Camp David Accords. It is more accurate to state that Israel has had a peace treaty—not with Egypt—but with the Sadat-Mubarak regime and with the Egyptian ruling elites that supported it. The people of Egypt were not consulted on the Camp David Accords and they have had no input on this important foreign policy decision. The same truism applies to Israel's 1994 peace treaty with Jordan. Moshe Arens, a Likud party hardliner and three-time Minister of Defense, addressed this topic with considerable candor and clarity at the start of the Arab Spring.

"The ugly facts," he noted, "are that the two peace treaties that Israel concluded so far—the one with Egypt and the other with Jordan—were both signed with dictators: Anwar Sadat and King Hussein."[64] He added that "the negotiations that for a while held some promise of reaching a peace agreement—

60. Benny Morris, *Islam's Strangehold on Israel*, THE NATIONAL INTEREST (Sept.12, 2011), http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/islams-stranglehold-israel-5875.

61. Barak Ravid, *Netanyahu: Arab Spring Pushing Mideast East Backward, not Forward*, HAARETZ (Nov. 24, 2011, 12:04 AM), http://www.haaretz.com/news/netanyahu-arab-spring-pushing-mideast-backward-not-forward-1.397353.

62. Hamilton, *supra* note 59.

63. *MK Ben Eliezer: Israel Offered Political Asylum to Mubarak*, HAARETZ (Aug, 3, 2011, 10:06 AM), http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/mk-ben-eliezer-israel-offered-political-asylum-to-mubarak-1.376721; *see* Helene Cooper et al., *In U.S. Signals to Egypt, Obama Straddled a Rift*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 12, 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/world/middleeast/13diplomacy.html?page wanted=all.

64. Moshe Arens, Op-Ed., *Can Israel Only Make Peace with Dictators?*, HAARETZ (Feb. 1, 2011, 1:59 AM), http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/can-israel-only-make-peace-with-dictators-1.340493.

with Syria and with the Palestine Liberation Organization—were also conducted with unsavory dictators."[65] With the gradual and inevitable spread of democracy throughout the region, this national security strategy is no longer tenable. Israel's long-term security in the Middle East can only be guaranteed when it makes peace with the people of the region, not with the dictators that rule over them. This can only happen if Israel is willing to give justice to Palestinians, which is a precondition for its acceptance as legitimate state in the eyes of the people of the Arab-Islamic world. Ibrahim Kalin, an adviser to the Turkish government, captures this point quite succinctly in calling on Israel to reassess its strategic priorities. "The Netanyahu government's defiant yet eventually self-destructive approach is indicative of the eclipse of Israeli strategic thinking," he observes.[66] "Israeli politicians fail to understand that the fundamental values of the new Middle East spearheaded by the Arab Spring are no longer occupation, dictatorship and alienation but justice, freedom and rule of law. No policy that does not take these values seriously can have legitimacy."[67]

V. CONCLUSION

There is a broad consensus among Middle East scholars that the region is entering a new historical phrase. Today, in contrast with the past, the key internal axis of conflict that will shape the contours of political power will be public demands for citizenship rights and effective and accountable government. While transitions to democracy will take time, and the consolidation of these transitions even longer, there is no denying that the Arab Spring is a turning point in the modern history of the region. The rules have changed and it can no longer be business as usual. For the United States, this will require an adjustment in terms of how it views and deals with a new Middle East. To his credit, at least rhetorically, President Obama has been on the right side of history.

On May 19, 2011, President Obama delivered a major foreign policy speech on the Arab Spring where he spoke about "a new chapter in American diplomacy."[68] In contrast to his predecessors, he sought to strike a balance between American interests and American values in the Middle East. He acknowledged that

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65. *Id.*

66. Ibrahim Kalin, Op-Ed., *Israel Misreads History, Corners Itself*, HURRIYET DAILY NEWS (Sept. 9, 2011, 12:00 AM), http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/israel-misreads-history-corners-itself.aspx?pageID=438&n=israel-misreads-history-corners-itself-2011-09-09.

67. *Id.*

68. Press Release, Office of the Press Sec'y, The White House, Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa (May 19, 2011), *available at* http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa [hereinafter Office of the Press Sec'y]. For background on Obama's foreign policy agenda with specific details on the Arab Spring, *see* Ryan Lizza, *The Political Consequentialist: How the Arab Spring Remade Obama's Foreign Policy*, THE NEW YORKER (May 2, 2011), http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/05/02/110502fa_fact_lizza.

> a strategy based solely on the narrow pursuit of these [longstanding American] interests will not fill an empty stomach or allow someone to speak their mind. Moreover, failure to speak to the broader aspirations of ordinary people will only feed the suspicion that has festered for years that the United States pursues our interests at their expense.[69]

In this speech, Obama announced a new policy toward the Middle East "to promote reform across the region, and to support transitions to democracy."[70] He noted that while "each country is different, we need to speak honestly about the principles we believe in, with friend and foe alike. Our message is simple," the President stated, "[i]f you take the risks that reform entails, you will have the full support of the United States."[71]

Whether the United States will be able to live up to these words remains to be seen. The fact that the U.S. has resumed the sale of arms to Bahrain—despite its crackdown on pro-democracy protesters—and the refusal to tie American aid to Egypt to progress on democratization, notwithstanding the arrest of American NGO workers by the Egyptian military, suggests greater continuity rather than a departure in U.S. policy toward the Middle East.[72]

In his recent book, *Obama and the Middle East*,[73] Fawaz Gerges echoes this skeptical reading of American policy. He observes that Obama has "shown . . . more continuity with the past than real change. He has adopted a centrist-realist approach toward the region, an approach consistent with the dominant U.S. foreign policy orientation."[74] The problem with this traditional approach toward the Middle East is that the old assumptions that shaped and guided America's approach toward the region will no longer work. A specter is haunting U.S. policy toward the Middle East. With mass revolution, democracy is now the only game in town. Adjusting to this new reality will take time and it will be difficult. But regardless of U.S. preferences or hopes, Washington is not in the driver seat. The Arab-Islamic world is coming of age and we are all observers of this historic, uncertain, and tumultuous phenomenon.

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69. Office of the Press Sec'y, *supra* note 68.

70. *Id.*

71. *Id.*

72. *See US Partially Resumes Arms Sales to Bahrain*, AL JAZEERA (ENGLISH) (May 12, 2012), http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/05/201251206551162 84.html; Steven Lee Myers, *Despite Rights Concerns, U.S. Plans to Resume Egypt Aid*, N.Y. TIMES (March 15, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/16/world/middleeast/us-military-aid-to-egypt-to-resume-officials-say.html?_r=0.

73. FAWAZ A. GERGES, OBAMA AND THE MIDDLE EAST: THE END OF AMERICA'S MOMENT? 233 (2012).

74. *Id.*