

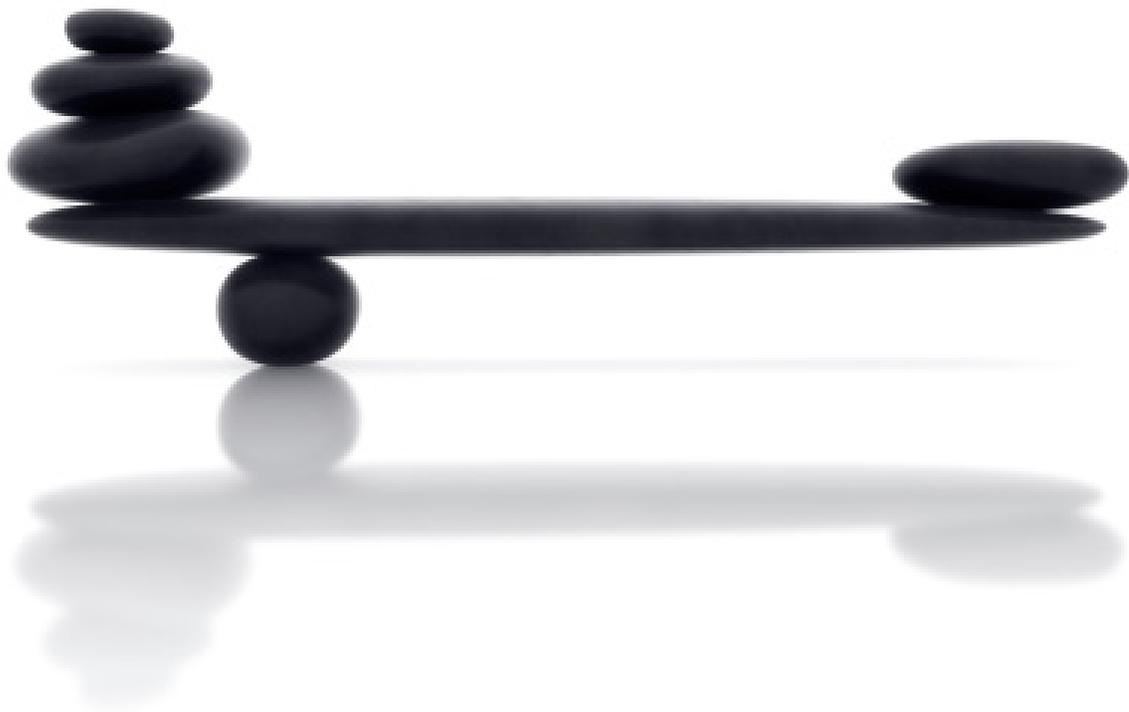
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THE ARAB WORLD IN FLUX

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The use of the term “Arab Spring” to describe the events of the past year is not a particularly good one. It does work as a good metaphor as one common item in spring is the weather is never stable. It will be nice one day and rainy the next. Rain in and of itself can be good or bad. It is a bad term in the sense that in the Middle East spring is short while this process is going to take a long time. It is complicated and will go through not one, but possibly eight, even 12 seasons before one can see if it will work or not. The most important point is change, change in a lot of the parameters that developed countries in particular have taken as a given. When those nations took that approach, they were blind to the developments in the region and continued to believe nothing had changed when there was, in fact, much change. Now, society has changed and that is the big difference. In Egypt, 56 percent of the population is under the age of 25. No Egyptian of that age has ever written to their president or been at war, creating a completely different mindset than has previously existed. Communication has also drastically changed, from the existence of only a few television stations to the ability to communicate through several mediums virtually all over the world. This affects how the youth think, how this population thinks, and how and when to hold governments accountable. Another issue is a lack of good governance across the region. This is a common threat to the Arab world. These problems exist within both rich and poor Arab countries.

Over the past ten years Arabs have changed how they identify themselves, primarily due to the large number of young individuals. The average Egyptian today is interested in the IP sector in India and grew up watching Hollywood movies from the States; a major shift. Therefore, this new issue of identity has developed in the Arab world. This has caused issues in the conservative society and the more open, liberal society. Some of the issues currently being discussed include the role of religion, the role of liberal, congressional parties, and the formulation of a new social contract. Arabs want to have access to their own information, they want to participate in the decision-making process and they want to hold governments accountable. Ultimately, they want to be able to take part in the process of change. This social contract currently being developed needs to be taken into account. There is ongoing debate on reform in Morocco, and they have moved progressively on women’s rights in recent years, opportunities in Libya and discussion on the role of women in Saudi Arabia.

The hegemony of authority is being broken down. The central authority is no longer as effective as it once was. The relationship between the military and civilians on the streets in Egypt is a good example of this. The military took a marvelous

position during the revolution, yet the protestors continued to question it and there has been continuous push and pulls between the two forces, not always with good result. There is this idea that authority no longer exists. The protestors, the council are the authority. A government is being put together and there will be authority. Parliament claims authority. A balance needs to be found. In the Middle East, the new Arab world, Muslims will have a more open, active political role, whether they obtain a majority or not. There will be a multitude of stakeholders that everyone will have to become accustomed to. This is a new paradigm with no clear evidence as to how it will affect the systems of politics and security in the Middle East. Will an Arab world with multiple stakeholders and so many voices speaking out still be able to speak as one region, or will it speak as several regions?

There is also this issue of what actually is a region. President Bush once suggested that we look at the greater Middle East, yet we cannot even solve our own problems. Another question is what actually is the role of monarchies and republicans. There is a simplistic ongoing discussion that there is a problem with the republics, not with the monarchies. Monarchies have succeeded in many ways, but this is a really silly argument. What needs to be examined is what will be the overriding theme of the region. Nationalism has been an overriding theme, but some are now arguing that the common theme is Islam, especially with different results coming up in different countries throughout the Middle East and an increasing system of Islamic political parties. Some will conclude that the system is breaking down so what comes in its place is negative. Yet, the system has not been working in recent years, and if it is not working then it is time to fix it. It is too early to say whether the results will be negative or positive. This is going to be an interactive system, not a system where one leader will have full authority of decision-making without responding to his or her people for any length of time. The initial reaction may be this is becoming a less secure region. However, if enough valuables are considered, it becomes a more secure region rather than a less secure system because no one, single factor is the dominant factor and therefore the absence of that factor does not change the long-term. If the leader dies or changes, the whole system does not collapse.

A scenario with more stakeholders and a more interactive system will create more short-term politics. Any system, elected president, elected parliament, will have to take into account short-term politics much more than in the past. The challenge will be preserving strategic interests while handling long-term politics. Because of checks and balances on long-term strategic interests, it is easier to see into the future in a democratic system than a non-democratic one. Short-term politics in the Middle East will



create a different environment where opposition may shift gradually. As a result, Arabs have become increasingly individualistic and nationalistic at the same time. There is an increase in activism, a desire to speak out, and the desire to participate in foreign policy. I advocated for decades that we need to speak out more vocally, not only on issues that relate to the region. Arabs will begin talking to their own authorities about everything from a peace process, to human rights, to whether or not they want to accept abortion. In the positions taken by Arab governments, they would also apply to security engagements and relationships.

There will be a more aggressive Arab position on double standards. Where and when double standards exist, our governments will be held accountable by their people, they would become more aggressive in responding to their kinds of standards. Ultimately, this will prevent the double standards from continuing for too long. It also helps all political stakeholders oppose double standards due to the political price of double standards, and because it will lead to a stronger position both in the Arab world and international arena. This may lead to more frequent arguments between friends in the short-term, but there will be less significant arguments, showing stability has prevailed. Agreements that representatives actually believe in, actually support can be achieved through this kind of process. Leaders will always have to be leaders and be ahead of the curve. Situations will not exist where leaders will sign agreements that constituents will not join in a reasonably short period of time. The argument heard for years was that agreements will be agreements whether you like them or not. When looking at the Arab Middle East, many countries will continue to be committed to Arab origins, will see a more Islamic flavor, and focus more on the Mediterranean and Europe. If this occurs, it will serve both the Mediterranean and European countries. A foreign policy issue would primarily, but not solely be centered on the issues of Palestine. The two-state solution remains the best option between Palestine and Israel. In the long-term, if this is not resolved, there will be more frustration and more anger. What is happening to the Palestinians is not only about their rights, but is also seen as an undignified situation for the Arab world. This is becoming a more prominent issue, with questions being raised in regards to conflict on the issue between Egypt and Israel.

This is not a function of the Arab Spring, but the issue will be more difficult to manage in the absence of peace talks. If the Arab world does not move forward due to concern with variables in a region in transition, the pressures will increase. Arab society is receptive to moving forward. This is helped by the fact that over half of the population has never been at war with anyone, including Israel. The perspective of the Arab youth is not that they want to go to war with Israel. However, they will want to preserve their rights, dignity and so on. The U.S. will continue to play an important role in the

decades to come, and while relations with the U.S. will be a primary objective, it will change. Although anti-American sentiment is not developing as a result of reforms, there will be tough love on both sides, U.S. and Arab. This is acceptable as long as the adjective continues to be tough. In the coming years we will see a larger Asian dimension in Egyptian politics. The U.S. will not be replaced in the Arab world by Asian nations, but there will be a larger Asian dimension, be that because of trade issues, energy issues, or to simply balance demographically in the Arab world.

Everyone was largely surprised by the events unfolding in the Arab world. In order to understand what is occurring, one needs to understand the current political and social issues because there will be players in short-term politics who will affect strategic politics. The existence of many variables makes it difficult to perfect the process. Arabs will have to find out what systems to support. Arabs need to be outgoing and engage with the world. New institutions also need to be developed. It will be difficult to develop functional new political institutions and reform existing ones in the absence of Arab-Israeli peace. Lastly, in order to succeed as a global community, the world needs to move past the post-World War II security logic. There needs to be a shift towards a collective security system based on a balance of global interests.

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