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Article 1.

NYT

Egypt's New Leader Spells Out Terms for U.S.-Arab Ties

David d. Kirkpatrick and Steven Erlanger

September 22, 2012 -- CAIRO — On the eve of his first trip to the United States as Egypt's new Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi said the United States needed to fundamentally change its approach to the Arab world, showing greater respect for its values and helping build a Palestinian state, if it hoped to overcome decades of pent-up anger.

A former leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt's first

democratically elected president, Mr. Morsi sought in a 90-minute interview with The New York Times to introduce himself to the American public and to revise the terms of relations between his country and the United States after the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, an autocratic but reliable ally.

He said it was up to Washington to repair relations with the Arab world and to revitalize the alliance with Egypt, long a cornerstone of regional stability.

If Washington is asking Egypt to honor its treaty with Israel, he said, Washington should also live up to its own Camp David commitment to Palestinian self-rule. He said the United States must respect the Arab world's history and culture, even when that conflicts with Western values.

And he dismissed criticism from the White House that he did not move fast enough to condemn protesters who recently climbed over the United States Embassy wall and burned the American flag in anger over a video that mocked the Prophet Muhammad.

“We took our time” in responding to avoid an explosive backlash, he said, but then dealt “decisively” with the small, violent element among the demonstrators.

“We can never condone this kind of violence, but we need to deal with the situation wisely,” he said, noting that the embassy employees were never in danger.

Mr. Morsi, who will travel to New York on Sunday for a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, arrives at a delicate moment. He faces political pressure at home to prove

his independence, but demands from the West for reassurance that Egypt under Islamist rule will remain a stable partner.

Mr. Morsi, 61, whose office was still adorned with nautical paintings that Mr. Mubarak left behind, said the United States should not expect Egypt to live by its rules.

“If you want to judge the performance of the Egyptian people by the standards of German or Chinese or American culture, then there is no room for judgment,” he said. “When the Egyptians decide something, probably it is not appropriate for the U.S. When the Americans decide something, this, of course, is not appropriate for Egypt.”

He suggested that Egypt would not be hostile to the West, but would not be as compliant as Mr. Mubarak either.

“Successive American administrations essentially purchased with American taxpayer money the dislike, if not the hatred, of the peoples of the region,” he said, by backing dictatorial governments over popular opposition and supporting Israel over the Palestinians.

He initially sought to meet with President Obama at the White House during his visit this week, but he received a cool reception, aides to both presidents said. Mindful of the complicated election-year politics of a visit with Egypt’s Islamist leader, Mr. Morsi dropped his request.

His silence in the immediate aftermath of the embassy protest elicited a tense telephone call from Mr. Obama, who also told a television interviewer that at that moment he did not consider Egypt an ally, if not an enemy either. When asked if he

considered the United States an ally, Mr. Morsi answered in English, “That depends on your definition of ally,” smiling at his deliberate echo of Mr. Obama. But he said he envisioned the two nations as “real friends.”

Mr. Morsi spoke in an ornate palace that Mr. Mubarak inaugurated three decades ago, a world away from the Nile Delta farm where the new president grew up, or the prison cells where he had been confined by Mr. Mubarak for his role in the Brotherhood. Three months after his swearing-in, the most noticeable change to the presidential office was a plaque on his desk bearing the Koranic admonition, “Be conscious of a day on which you will return to God.”

A stocky figure with a trim beard and wire-rim glasses, he earned a doctorate in materials science at the University of Southern California in the early 1980s. He spoke with an easy confidence in his new authority, reveling in an approval rating he said was at 70 percent. When he grew animated, he slipped from Arabic into crisp English.

Little known at home or abroad until just a few months ago, he was the Brotherhood’s second choice as a presidential nominee after the first choice was disqualified. On the night of the election, the generals who had ruled since Mr. Mubarak’s ouster issued a decree keeping most presidential powers for themselves.

But last month Mr. Morsi confounded all expectations by prying full executive authority back from the generals. In the interview, when an interpreter suggested that the generals had “decided” to exit politics, Mr. Morsi quickly corrected him.

“No, no, it is not that they ‘decided’ to do it,” he interjected in English, determined to clarify that it was he who removed them. “This is the will of the Egyptian people through the elected president, right?”

“The president of the Arab Republic of Egypt is the commander of the armed forces, full stop. Egypt now is a real civil state. It is not theocratic, it is not military. It is democratic, free, constitutional, lawful and modern.”

He added, “We are behaving according to the Egyptian people’s choice and will, nothing else — is it clear?”

He praised Mr. Obama for moving “decisively and quickly” to support the Arab Spring revolutions, and he said he believed that Americans supported “the right of the people of the region to enjoy the same freedoms that Americans have.”

Arabs and Americans have “a shared objective, each to live free in their own land, according to their customs and values, in a fair and democratic fashion,” he said, adding that he hoped for “a harmonious, peaceful coexistence.”

But he also argued that Americans “have a special responsibility” for the Palestinians because the United States had signed the 1978 Camp David accord. The agreement called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank and Gaza to make way for full Palestinian self-rule.

“As long as peace and justice are not fulfilled for the Palestinians, then the treaty remains unfulfilled,” he said.

He made no apologies for his roots in the Brotherhood, the insular religious revival group that was Mr. Mubarak’s main

opposition and now dominates Egyptian politics.

“I grew up with the Muslim Brotherhood,” he said. “I learned my principles in the Muslim Brotherhood. I learned how to love my country with the Muslim Brotherhood. I learned politics with the Brotherhood. I was a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood.”

He left the group when he took office but remains a member of its political party. But he said he sees “absolutely no conflict” between his loyalty to the Brotherhood and his vows to govern on behalf of all, including members of the Christian minority or those with more secular views.

“I prove my independence by taking the correct acts for my country,” he said. “If I see something good from the Muslim Brotherhood, I will take it. If I see something better in the Wafd” — Egypt’s oldest liberal party — “I will take it.”

He repeatedly vowed to uphold equal citizenship rights of all Egyptians, regardless of religion, sex or class. But he stood by the religious arguments he once made as a Brotherhood leader that neither a woman nor a Christian would be a suitable president.

“We are talking about values, beliefs, cultures, history, reality,” he said. He said the Islamic position on presidential eligibility was a matter for Muslim scholars to decide, not him. But regardless of his own views or the Brotherhood’s, he said, civil law was another matter.

“I will not prevent a woman from being nominated as a candidate for the presidential campaign,” he said. “This is not in

the Constitution. This is not in the law. But if you want to ask me if I will vote for her or not, that is something else, that is different.”

He was also eager to reminisce about his taste of American culture as a graduate student at the University of Southern California. “Go, Trojans!” he said, and he remembered learning about the world from Barbara Walters in the morning and Walter Cronkite at night. “And that’s the way it is!” Mr. Morsi said with a smile.

But he also displayed some ambivalence. He effused about his admiration for American work habits, punctuality and time management. But when an interpreter said that Mr. Morsi had “learned a lot” in the United States, he quickly interjected a qualifier in English: “Scientifically!”

He was troubled by the gangs and street of violence of Los Angeles, he said, and dismayed by the West’s looser sexual mores, mentioning couples living together out of wedlock and what he called “naked restaurants,” like Hooters.

“I don’t admire that,” he said. “But that is the society. They are living their way.”

Article 2.

AL-MONITOR

Jordan Opens Negotiations With

Muslim Brotherhood

Tamer Samadi

Sep 21, 2012 -- Sources from the Muslim Brotherhood leadership in Jordan revealed to Al-Hayat yesterday [Sept. 20] new details about a mediation team led by a former Jordanian figure close to the royal court. The mediation aims at dissuading the Brotherhood from boycotting parliamentary elections scheduled before the end of the year, the sources said. Former head of the royal court Jawad Anani told the Jordanian News Agency (Petra) yesterday evening: “My contacts with the Islamic Movement are for nationalistic purposes and I have not been entrusted by anyone with this mission.”

Anani added that he had “stressed to the movement’s leaders the need to achieve change from inside the parliament not outside.”

However, sources from the Brotherhood said that “the new mediation processed was launched by the royal court” and that it was being led by “Anani, who met with a number of the Brotherhood’s leaders on Wednesday [Sept. 19], emphasizing that he is delegated by King Abdullah II of Jordan to dissuade us from boycotting elections.”

Al-Hayat learned that Jamil Abou Bar, Atef Joulani and Faraj Chalhoub are among the leaders that Anani met with, and all of them are members of the Muslim Brotherhood’s political circle.

The sources explained that Anani asked the Brotherhood to launch a new initiative that guarantees their participation in the

future political process. A prominent leader of the Brotherhood told Al-Hayat that “the Higher Committee for Reform will hold an urgent meeting the day after tomorrow to discuss the new initiative that would be submitted to the royal mediator.”

It is worth noting that the Higher Committee for Reform emanates from the Brotherhood and is headed by Salem Flayhan, a leader of an extremist element within the Brotherhood.

Sources from the Brotherhood leadership revealed that the movement sought to adopt a new version of the electoral law that involves “the system where each man receives three votes in each circumscription, while the fourth vote is preserved for the national electoral list.”

Leaders of the Brotherhood have started to express their willingness to postpone their demands regarding the constitutional amendments until elections are over. These amendments would affect the king’s powers to dissolve parliament and to form and dismiss a government.

These leaders also said that the Brotherhood may move away from the demand to elect the Senate, the higher chamber of parliament that the king appoints. However, the sources asserted that there is a new vision that calls for “reducing the number of seats in the Senate to a quarter of the members of parliament, provided that the king selects the members from political blocs that are expected to win the elections.”

Moreover, Al-Hayat received a copy of an internal memorandum that the Brotherhood distributed to its managerial staff in the provinces. This memorandum seeks to mobilize opposition

demonstrations at the beginning of next month, asserting that the number of participants will exceed 50,000.

The four page memorandum includes a call to the Brotherhood managerial staff to meet on a daily basis to “make sure that the plan aiming at successfully mobilizing the protests — which are scheduled for Oct. 10 — is implemented.”

The memorandum stated: “Each member is asked to have a road map for mobilizing masses within the remaining time. All members, including those who are sick even and will be transported by vehicles, are expected to participate.”

It continued: “Every member of the Brotherhood must be dedicated to communicate with his relatives, close friends, acquaintances, fellow employees and various Islamic groups and patriots who are eager to preserve the nation.”

The memorandum also called for the formation of hotbeds to communicate with civil society activists and leaders and focus on the participation of groups affiliated with universities, schools and women’s organizations.

The note includes a call addressed to the Brotherhood managerial staff and supporters to step out of their vehicles on the demonstration day, protest in the streets and not to return to their houses if security forces prevent them from reaching the central demonstration points, which will be located in the center of Amman.

Article 3.

Foreign Policy

What Is Iran Doing in Syria?

Ali Alfoneh

September 21, 2012 -- Until recently, the Islamic Republic's military involvement in Syria was shrouded in mystery. When The Free Syrian Army paraded alleged members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) on al-Arabiya this summer, Iranian officials insisted that the abducted men were "pilgrims" and that Iran's support to Syria was limited to moral backing and economic assistance.

In recent months, however, there has been a shift in Iranian statements. Regime officials have been increasingly categorical in their admissions of Iran's military presence in Syria, while simultaneously maintaining some ambiguity about the nature of its intervention. Most recently, on September 16, IRGC Commander Mohammad-Ali Aziz Jafari admitted that the IRGC's Quds Force, which is the extraterritorial operations arm of the IRGC, "are present" in Syria. However, he added that "this does not mean that Iran has a military presence" there and that Iran's aid was limited to "consultancy and economic assistance."

Ambiguity may reflect differences over strategy among the Islamic Republic's ruling elites -- and represent a veiled threat that Iran can flex its military muscles even more in Syria. Speaking a day after Jafari's candid interview, for instance, Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast further complicated interpretation of Iran's messaging by condemning

what he called some media outlets' "selective, incorrect, and politically motivated use" of Jafari's statements. "Iran has not in any way a military presence in the region, particularly in Syria," he stressed.

The latest controversy over Jafari's statement is not the first time that Iran has sent mixed signals about the nature of its involvement in Syria. On May 26, Quds Force deputy commander Brigadier General Esmail Qaani admitted Iranian forces were present in Syria in an attempt to "prevent great massacres" there. Then, on Aug.22, Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi declared Iran's readiness to "live up to its defense and security obligations upon Syria's request," but he did not concede that Iran maintained any military presence there at the moment.

When it comes to potential differences among Iran's ruling elites, it is hardly surprising that IRGC officials would openly boast of Iran's military presence in Syria. The organization has an interest in making its presence known in order to increase its leverage over other branches of the Iranian government. This isn't the first time we've witnessed this phenomenon: In spring 2008, Quds Force commander Major General Qassem Suleimani sent a message to Gen. David Petraeus, then the commander of international forces in Iraq, claiming that he controlled Iranian policy in Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, and Afghanistan. Suleimani's message was clear: The United States should negotiate with the Quds Force rather than other branches of the Islamic Republic in order to solve the problems it was facing in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

Suleimani's message to Petraeus, of course, was self-serving. If

the United States proved willing to engage in negotiations with him, it would further enhance his prestige and the Quds Forces's control over strategic decision-making in Iran. Similarly, Qaani and Jafari's admissions of the IRGC's military presence in Syria is a way of communicating that those who desire a negotiated solution to the crisis in Syria must involve the Quds Force.

The Foreign Ministry, on the other hand, probably opposes Iran's military involvement in Syria lest it result in the Quds Force taking the lead on Iran's Syria policy. This may not only explain Mehmanparast stressing that Iran has "no military presence in the region," but also the Foreign Ministry's systematic attempts at mediating between the opposition and President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

The statements of Iranian military involvement can also be interpreted as the IRGC's way of threatening to increase its intervention, which would transform civil war in Syria into a regional war. The threat obviously aims to force Westerners, Turks, and Saudis to think twice before getting further embroiled in a proxy war. The ploy, however, could be too little, too late: Assad's regime may be beyond salvation, and increased IRGC presence in Syria is no guarantee for success.

According to the Wall Street Journal, a certain Brigadier General Hossein Hamadani has been sent to Syria to oversee the Quds Force's operations. It's not hard to understand why Hamadani would be chosen: According to his official biography Taklif Ast Baradar ("Brother, It's Duty"), he has extensive experience in suppressing the Kurdish separatist movements in Iranian Kurdistan in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 revolution and during the Iran-Iraq war. In 2005, Jafari, the

founding commander of the IRGC Strategic Studies Center, appointed Hamadani his deputy, and together they devised doctrines to counter "velvet revolutions." In 2009 and 2010, Hamadani managed to effectively suppress anti-regime rallies in Tehran. Hamadani's background may be of some help to him today. However, with the protests in Syria having developed into an armed rebellion, and with the rebels gaining access to more sophisticated weaponry, he may find himself fighting a very different war than the one he won against peaceful protesters in the streets of Tehran.

Ali Alfoneh is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Article 4.

World Politics Review

The Realist Prism: Syria Crisis Could Redraw Middle East Map

Nikolas Gvosdev

21 Sep 2012 -- U.S. pundits commenting on the wave of protests that have swept across the Middle East this past week have tended to focus on "finger-pointing and partisan sniping," as Greg Scoblete notes, with conservatives vaguely calling for Washington to show more "strength" and liberals advocating more "outreach." Few have wanted to deal with a far more

unpleasant reality: The de facto coalition of Turkey, Israel and "moderate" Sunni Arab states that for decades worked to advance U.S. interests in the region is disintegrating.

The aftermath of the Iraq War and the outbreak of the Arab Spring were just the first tremors of this regional reconfiguration. Moving forward, long-established geopolitical landmarks in the region will continue to disappear, especially if the coming year sees the collapse of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus and military action taken against Iran in an effort to halt its nuclear program. Ian Bremmer is right to warn that, whether it is President Barack Obama who returns to the White House or Republican nominee Mitt Romney who takes residence there come January 2013, the next U.S. president will be forced to navigate "undiscovered country" in charting policy toward the Middle East.

The events of the past 20 months are ample reminders that unexpected "black swans" can upend previously expected outcomes. Two years ago, U.S. policymakers correctly assumed that political transitions would be underway in Libya and Egypt, laying the groundwork for evolutionary political and economic reform. However, analysts expected Seif al-Islam Gadhafi and Gamal Mubarak, rather than Mohamed Magariaf and Mohamed Morsi, to be the new chief executives leading those transitions. What are some other possible game-changers in the region that U.S. policy may have to take into account?

Let's start with Syria and the possible outcomes if the Sunni-led rebellion topples Assad. The optimistic scenario is that a rapidly formed, inclusive government restores order throughout the country. But it is just as likely that the Alawite military elite, having lost control of Damascus, would withdraw to their traditional strongholds on the coast where, aided by Christians

fearing a Sunni ascendancy, they proclaim an Alawite-dominated state, separate and independent from the rest of Syria. Following the precedent already employed in 2008 with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia might be inclined to grant immediate recognition. And in return for an agreement securing its naval facilities at Tartus, Moscow might offer weapons and assistance to the new government to secure its control over its territory.

Meanwhile, the Assad government has essentially withdrawn from many parts of the Kurdish-dominated northeast to concentrate on fighting the rebels, allowing local Kurds de facto autonomy. A successful Alawite secession makes it far more likely that the Syrian Kurdish region would press a rump Syrian government in Damascus to obtain, if not complete independence, a level of autonomy similar to what Iraqi Kurds already enjoy, as well as the right to pursue closer relations with Iraqi Kurdistan.

But if that happened, how long would it take for the ties that bind these Kurdish areas to Iraq and Syria to fray, leading to the emergence of a separate and united Kurdish state? Just as South Sudan separated from Sudan after enjoying several years of autonomy, Iraqi Kurdistan could try to negotiate a separation from Iraq and then unite with a Syrian Kurdish entity. This in turn would completely change the nature of the Kurdish insurgency inside of Turkey itself. Overshadowed by media coverage of the anti-American riots throughout the Islamic world over the past two weeks, fighting between the Turkish military and Kurdish militants in the southeast portion of the country has flared, with the violence described as "the bloodiest phase [of the conflict] in more than a decade." Would Kurds in Turkey push to transform the Turkish Republic into a Turkish-

Kurdish federation, and in so doing absorb the Syrian and Iraqi Kurdish entities? And would a government in Ankara already dismantling some of Kemal Ataturk's legacy in terms of secularism be prepared to dispense with his insistence on ethnic homogeneity as the basis for the state? Or would we see another and even more bloody round of fighting, this time spilling over into other areas of the Middle East?

A collapse of Syria, if accompanied by a Kurdish secession from Iraq, would also sign the death warrant for Iraq in its current configuration. Such a pared-down Iraqi state would be absolutely dominated by Iraqi Shiites, leaving Sunnis to choose between accommodating themselves to clear second-class status, emigrating or rebelling. Given the likely fate of Syria's Christians under a post-Assad regime, and with hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians already in exile in Syria, one could also foresee growing pressure to create a Christian enclave. This in turn would raise the questions of whether to create a Druze entity from parts of Lebanon and Syria, and whether a Shiite entity in southern Lebanon would also emerge, making it near-impossible for Lebanon to remain intact.

Meanwhile, the Palestinians might not remain quiescent while all of this is going on, but instead decide push for statehood even in the absence of any diplomatic agreement with Israel. In response to such a unilateral declaration of independence, Israel might decide to annex those territories on the West Bank where the main settlement blocs are located, making them part of Israel proper. In such a scenario, it is not hard to imagine the Israeli-Palestinian conflict flaring from a low-level insurgency to full-scale military operations, triggering Iraq-style refugee flows as people fled the conflict zones.

If that happened, the United States would find itself, as it was in

1974, caught between its commitments to both Israel and Saudi Arabia. Realist military considerations would probably keep Egypt from taking any concrete steps against Israel. But it is unlikely that the Israeli-Egypt peace treaty could survive, and Cairo would be even less inclined to support, even tacitly, U.S. or Israeli military strikes against Iran.

In short, the entire delicate structure of relationships on which the U.S. strategic agenda in the region rests would disintegrate. It is no wonder that King Abdullah II of Jordan bluntly said last month that “the breakup of Syria . . . would create problems that would take us decades to come back from.”

It is a clear warning, but the conditions that could make those problems unavoidable may already be in place. Just as new and unknown faces have risen to power in a number of Middle East countries over the past year, the very configuration of familiar states and boundaries could change very rapidly as well.

Washington, and other outside players in the region, need to be prepared.

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Article 5.

The National Interest

Never the Twain Shall Meet

September 21, 2012 -- Both Republican and Democratic administrations often have promoted the notion that the United States has the right and the obligation to disseminate its values worldwide.

In the context of promoting these values, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has placed the cause of protecting Internet freedom on the top of the U.S. foreign-policy agenda. Hence during a conference at the Hague last year, Clinton stated that Washington needed to take “a stand for freedom of expression on the Internet, especially on behalf of cyber dissidents and bloggers” and support those in the Middle East and elsewhere “who are blocked from accessing entire categories of Internet content.”

Today, there is an irony in the fact that much of the anti-American violence in Arab countries has been driven the same kind of “Internet content”—in this case, the trailer of an anti-Muslim film posted on YouTube, reflecting the American tradition of freedom of expression, including the Internet freedom that Secretary Clinton has called upon the leaders of Egypt and Libya to respect.

Muslim demonstrators are accusing Americans of not respecting their religious tradition by permitting the dissemination of a film that mocks the Prophet Muhammad. Perhaps if the Egyptian and Libyan governments had blocked their citizens “from accessing entire categories of Internet content,” the U.S. embassies in those countries may have not been attacked.

The American wishful thinking—and it enjoyed clear bipartisan support—was that democratization and liberalization in the Arab World, either through U.S.-led “regime change” in Iraq or by welcoming a popular uprising in Egypt, would turn the peoples in these countries into born-again Westerners. After all, Ahmed Chalabi was a graduate of MIT, and many of the protesters on Tahrir Square had a lot of friends on Facebook.

In reality, free and democratic elections brought to power leaders who are not “just like us” and who represent peoples who don’t share our dreams. And when this reality bites, in the form of attacks on U.S. embassies, the loudest responses are unrealistic. Some Republicans and conservatives want to fight a war of civilizations, while Democrats and liberals call for diplomatic-missionary work of the kind pursued by democracy-promoting NGOs.

But instead of worrying about a clash of civilizations or fantasizing about their convergence through a process of U.S.-led cultural globalization, we need to consider another option: a live-and-let-live arrangement under which national cultures evolve on their own, reflecting their unique histories, values and time horizons.

Hence, freedom of expression shouldn't be considered a universal value. In fact, even Western societies embrace different approaches to the principle, with Britain and Germany, for example, applying restrictions on the publication of certain offensive material, while in the United States the First Amendment imposes almost no restrictions.

So it's not surprising that other standards of free speech are

being applied in Muslim societies that are adopting Islamist political agendas. They may be inconsistent with Western secular values but are supported by the majority of citizens and mandated by the kind of free and democratic elections promoted by Western leaders.

But pursuing a live-and-let-live approach involves reciprocity. Such an approach assumes that if Americans tone down their crusading impulses in their relationship with the Muslim world, Muslim leaders and publics will accept that Americans regard freedom of expression as a core national and cultural value and that the U.S. government must respect that principle, even if that involves the posting online of a lot of disgusting stuff, which includes hate-speech aimed at Catholics, Mormons, Jews and, yes, even Muslims.

At a time when the rules of engagement between the United States and the new Islamist governments in the Middle East are evolving, President Obama and other public figures should make it clear that Americans are not going to modify their liberal traditions in response to outside pressure—and that, at the same time, they also don't have any intentions of imposing those traditions on others.

Whether the turmoil in the Middle East will bring about a liberal and secular spring or an authoritarian and theocratic winter—or will be a long period of unstable political weather—should be left to the people of the Middle East to decide at their own pace. They will have to live eventually with the outcome in the same way that Americans live with theirs.

A principle of separate but equal should not apply to the

management of the relationship between citizens of a national community, but it may be relevant to the way our fragmented international system works. To paraphrase Rudyard Kipling: East is East, and West and West, and, hey, sometimes the twains don't have to meet. Contrary to the fantasies concocted by the prophets of globalization, good cultural fences could make for good global neighbors.

Leon Hadar, senior analyst at Wikistrat, a geostrategic consulting group, is the author of Sandstorm: Policy Failure in the Middle East

Article 6.

Agence Global

New Arab Realities, Historic and Historical

Rami G. Khouri

22 Sep 2012 -- I had the pleasure this week of mingling with historians at a conference at Missouri State University, co-sponsored by Drury University and universities in Oklahoma

and Arkansas, which allowed me to share analyses with them on the issues in the ongoing Arab uprisings that are truly historic and others that are merely fleeting. Using the narrative tools of the journalist along with the analytical lens of the historians, I suggested that we can already identify a series of genuinely historic, new and meaningful developments in many of the Arab states in transformation, after 21 months of the Arab uprisings.

Here is my list of the five most important ones:

1. New legitimacies are coming into play, including legitimate governance structures, leaders and political actors, replacing their former counterparts that enjoyed incumbency but had long ago lost legitimacy. The transition from mass public humiliation to newfound legitimacy in national governance and the exercise of power is the single most important foundational change that is taking place in these Arab uprisings and national reconfigurations. These new legitimacies provide the foundation on which all other new developments occur, especially new national systems of governance and citizen rights.

2. New actors now participate in the process of contested politics that will shape national governments systems and policies at home and abroad; these include most notably revolutionary and other youth, individual citizens with the power to choose and change governments and presidents, Muslim Brothers and more hard-line Salafist Islamists (some of whom lead or participate in coalition governments), tribes (some with militias), secular-nationalist political parties, the armed forces that now engage in open rather than secret politics, the judiciary, civil society groups, and private sector interests.

We should note three important aspects of these new players. They all emanate from these Arab societies and did not parachute in from abroad, and they now operate in public and with populist democratic legitimacy, rather than working in the shadows as many of them did before, including the military, tribal forces, the private sector, and some Islamists. They reflect the important development that very few people are now excluded or marginalized, as was the case previously when the vast majority of citizens were shut out from the decision-making process. And, they evolve and change, as they share or seek power via the consent of the governed; they soften or harden positions and clarify their policies in response to citizen demands, and so they act in a political manner, reflecting their need to remain legitimate and credible in the eyes of their supporters and the public at large.

3. New accountabilities: Power is no longer exercised totally with abandon, but rather public decisions now are often held accountable to checks and balances by other legitimate actors and institutions in society. Among those who are now more accountable than they were before 2011 are some presidents, parliaments, ministers, and security-military officials, along with the private sector and foreign powers. It seems clear now that no single group in Egypt, Tunisia or Libya can try to monopolize power and dominate the state decision-making process as did the former autocratic and dictatorial regimes that were overthrown. If they do, they will immediately be confronted by countervailing pressures by others in society who insist on maintaining the pluralism that has been earned with the citizenry's rebellion and blood.

4. New rules, primarily in the form of new constitutions that capture the legitimacy and accountability imperatives, and transform the concept of democratic pluralism and citizen rights into practical applications of the rule of law. The intensive consultations and contestations taking place now in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya over the drafting of new constitutions that reflect a genuine national consensus are the single most important political process underway in this post-regime change phase of the national reconfiguration projects underway. They capture the immediate gains of the revolutionary changes, which include free citizens and organized parties and other groups (civil society, religious, tribal and private sector forces) engaging in peaceful political dialog and contestation in the public realm. This is both historic (it never happened before seriously) and historical (it will go on for decades or centuries).

5. Seminal new balances are being defined and negotiated in several crucial realms of public life that will shape national systems for decades to come. The most important ones strike me as the balance between military and civilian officials, between religiosity and secularism in public life, and between private-tribal-local and public-national identities. These balances required decades or even centuries to be fully agreed in other countries and to result in stable, credible political systems. The process to define them has just started and will take years to reach conclusions.

These five developments seem to me to represent some truly historic consequences that we can identify from the last 21 months of transformations in several Arab countries, and they

are the reason I remain optimistic that the future for many Arab countries will continue to brighten in the years ahead.

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Article 7.