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Article 1.

The Council on Foreign Relations

Syria's Future Worries U.S. Allies

An Interview with Jon B. Alterman

April 26, 2011 -- Syria is beset by growing protests and the government has used the army in a brutal crackdown. Middle East expert Jon B. Alterman says there is considerable concern and uncertainty among U.S. officials about what will happen going forward, particularly should the country's President Bashar al-Assad be ousted. Complicating U.S. policy on Syria, he adds, are the many U.S. allies in the region such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel that want to keep Assad in power. "I think the fear of many is that a post-Bashar Syria would actually empower non-state proxies of Iran to action and in the net, help Iran in the Arab world." Alterman also questions whether democracy will take hold in the short term in the Middle East. "The nature of these protest movements make it hard for them to enter into normal politics," he says. "It's hard to know whether some of these activists, frustrated by their inability to effect change in 2011, in 2015, or 2016 will regroup and produce an entrepreneurial political culture."

Do you have any thoughts on how this Syrian turmoil is going to resolve itself?

Syria is not like the other places. It is less internationally connected than Egypt is. It is less internationally isolated than Libya is. It is more ruthless than Tunisia. The Syrians also have the advantage of being able to learn from what other leaders have done and what their mistakes have been. The Syrian instinct is to talk soft; but to act hard.

In other words, talk broadly about reform but be very conservative about introducing real changes.

Can you give an example?

They've announced that they are lifting the emergency law established in 1963, but they are not about to give up power. They reportedly have deployed more than three thousand troops to Deraa to put down the uprising there.

That could be quite bloody. There is really no armed force against them.

I assume the intention of the Syrian leadership is to demonstrate that they have the capacity for so much force that they don't have to use it. It also seems to me, however, quite clear that we are not close to the final denouement here. There are probably several more rounds [to go] of both efforts to repress and the contrary push, to turn this into a genuine nationwide revolt.

I guess we'll know better in a few weeks at least if the use of force has really quelled the opposition.

The Syrian instinct is to talk soft; but to act hard. In other words, talk broadly about reform but be very conservative about introducing real changes. We haven't seen the decisive moment in Syria. The fact that Syria is so isolated in the world may make it easier for the Syrians to act with impunity. In Cairo, every [television] company in the world was broadcasting from Tahrir Square. Egypt's own self-image is as a country that is deeply connected to the world. Syria's self image, on the contrary, is that of a country that's hunkering down, a country that has real enemies. When the national narrative is about real enemies, it makes it easier to cut yourself off, to use your force, and to keep the

world from knowing much. In terms of the Syrian people, there has not yet been the sort of catalytic moment where people either say "this is too much, ■ going to stop protesting" or "this is too much, ■ going to push on." We haven't gotten there yet. I don't know if we will, or when we will, but that point hasn't come.

Some people have been speculating that a change in leadership in Syria would be a plus because it would reduce Iran's influence in the region. Do you share that view?

Syria is Iran's closest state ally in the Arab world – there are also non-state allies [like] [Hezbollah](#) [in Lebanon] and [Hamas](#) [in the Palestinian territories]. I think the fear of many is that a post-Bashar Syria would actually empower non-state proxies of Iran to action and in the net, help Iran in the Arab world.

You've worked in the U.S. State Department on Middle Eastern policy. So far the United States has been publicly critical of the repression in Syria, but it also seemed that the United States was hoping that Assad would actually institute reforms and solve the situation that way.

The Obama administration has been struggling to find its footing, faced with all the revolts in the Middle East. In the beginning, there was a belated suggestion for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to step down which went over quite poorly among the United States' Arab allies in the Middle East. But it clearly played a role in President Mubarak's decision to resign. There has been a U.S. call for the end of Muammar al-Qaddafi's rule in Libya. This has not prompted Qaddafi to step down. [Instead] it has been used at home to criticize the administration for not following up vigorously on its policy. When we look at Syria, we not only have the question of what

the United States wants, but the complicating factor that many U.S. allies [in the region] seem to want to keep Bashar in power. If you look at the Israeli press, there are articles expressing extreme concern about what may follow in Syria after Bashar. The Saudis and Turks are also reportedly concerned about what might follow if Bashar leaves. So, Syria's significant neighbors, all of whom have close relations with the United States, are deeply concerned about events in Syria. That only underlines concerns in the U.S. government about what might follow after Bashar al-Assad. Many officials are reluctant to get too far out in front, partly because of the unanswerable question of what are you going to do to follow up if Bashar leaves. U.S. officials do not want to alienate allies. And there is a desire to avoid "owning" a post-Bashar environment in Syria because we are having so much trouble having influence over the post-Saddam environment in Iraq.

What would be the worst case scenario in Syria that Israelis, Saudis, and Turks are worried about?

The worst case is sustained turmoil with jihadi groups operating out of the country; extreme sectarian violence and a period of proxy wars throughout the region.

With all the changes going on starting with Tunisia and then Egypt, would you say that in six months to a year's time the area will be more democratic, more open to change, more amenable to the United States?

My sense is disappointment in six months and more possibilities in six years. The status quo forces in the Middle East, particularly the military, remain extremely strong. The wealthy entrepreneurial families remain extremely strong. The nature of these protest

movements make it hard for them to enter into normal politics. To go from the post-modern politics of Facebook groups to the modern politics of getting people in power to make concessions is an extraordinarily difficult task. They don't seem on the verge of being very successful in those countries. It's hard to know whether some of these activists, frustrated by their inability to effect change in 2011, in 2015, or 2016 will regroup and really produce an entrepreneurial political culture, and a more entrepreneurial economic culture. The near-term prospect is that the democratic politics of the Middle East will be much more skeptical of U.S intervention, will be much less willing to do things to accommodate the United States. The militaries remain strong; the militaries won't cut ties with the United States. But the overall tenor will be towards much more skepticism towards the United States, and much more skepticism towards Israel. The United States has economic policies, which don't help ordinary Arabs, and the United States is waging war against Muslims throughout the world. So the public perception is that that's what we have from the United States.

You would think that the democratic forces would be looking towards close relations with the United States.

The United States actively supports Israeli activities in the region. The United States actively supports both militaries and the monarchs of the region who are responsible for the political repression. The United States has economic policies, which don't help ordinary Arabs, and the United States is waging war against Muslims throughout the world. So the public perception is that that's what we have from the United States, and close ties aren't in the interest of the people but in the interest of the aggressive leadership.

So even if we support the overthrow of the current leaders, we're not actually winning ourselves a popularity contest?

The goal of U.S. policy has to be to lead towards something different, and what kinds of tools are there to do that when we have small numbers of people who are far away and don't understand the situation well in many cases. What's our leverage to lead these situations to a better outcome? We have some leverage, but it's not a huge amount.

Egypt is a prime example where the United States and the Egyptian military have been very close for years, and we were very close with Mubarak. Now that he's gone, we'll have to start almost from scratch again, right?

No, because the military remains in control. We have quite a positive relationship with the military and the military's been extremely eager to mature its relationship with the United States through all of this. If your goal is to wholly transform Egypt and empower the Facebook kids to rule the country, I think we're likely to be bitterly disappointed. If the goal is an Egypt whose policies are a small change from the status quo, but not a complete revolution, then I think the prospects are much better. The danger in Egypt remains that you're going to have a political elite at the time the economy weakens significantly because of tourism going away, foreign direct investment drying up, capital flight, global economy crisis arising, and that could lead Egypt to very different kind of political system than we now have.

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Article 2.

TIME

Syria: There Will Be (Lots More) Blood

Tony Karon

April 26, 2011 -- Unable to assuage their grievances with empty promises of reform, Syria's President Bashar al-Assad this week adopted the "Tiananmen Model" of dealing with a popular protest movement. Like the Chinese authorities in 1989, Assad on Monday sent in the tanks and thousands of troops to reclaim the streets of Deraa, where the rebellion began a month ago in protest at the arrest of schoolchildren for scrawling anti-regime graffiti. Scores of Syrians have already been killed in the regime's crackdown, but sending in the tanks is a symbolic escalation: As Oklahoma University Syria expert Joshua Landis points out, there's no military reason to use armor against unarmed demonstrators; its purpose is to intimidate by demonstrating the overwhelming advantage in firepower of a regime willing to use it rather than yield power.

The regime hopes that an overwhelming display of ruthless force will put an end to the uprising. That may be its only choice if it remains unwilling to contemplate ceding its monopoly on power to a genuinely democratic political order. And the regime appears to be calculating that it can muster sufficient domestic support from the ethnic, sectarian and class interests protected by the regime -- and withstand any international pressure, given the West's ambivalence about ousting Assad -- to tough out the storm, and then offer more reforms, on its own terms, once its iron control of the streets is restored.

Just as the regime of Saddam Hussein had relied on Iraq's Sunni minority to staff its administrative and security structures -- and to defend their relatively privileged status in the face of any challenge

by the Shi'ite majority -- so does Assad's regime rely on his own Alawite sect (comprising 12% of the population) to run the security forces that are the regime's key pillar. That and the support, or at least quiescence of the Sunni and Christian urban middle class and elites, is what the regime will be counting on as it unleashes murderous violence on the rebellious towns of the impoverished and more socially conservative Sunni hinterland.

Beyond his own Alawite base, which has benefited most from the regime, Assad is expecting that key power centers inside and outside Syria will conclude that no matter how odious they find his regime, they're unwilling to help topple it for fear of the consequences. For now, that may not be a bad bet.

This is not a regime whose security forces are likely to turn in the face of popular protests in the way that Tunisia's and Egypt's did -- or to split in the way that Libya's have -- and protests appear to have been limited in the two key cities of Damascus and Aleppo. Landis points out that the rebellion has not managed to draw in the middle and upper classes of the main cities, who prefer stability or fear the consequences of chaos.

The same may be true for the Western powers. Beirut-based analyst Rami Khouri suggests that from a geopolitical standpoint, many of the key international stakeholders approach Syria as the equivalent of a bank deemed too big to fail.

Statements in Western capitals about imposing new sanctions on Syria are almost a pro-forma response to an unconscionable escalation of violence by the regime against its own citizens. But the measures likely to be adopted, targeting the foreign holdings of key individuals in the regime, are unlikely to alter the power calculations of the key decision makers in Damascus.

That could simply be an illustration of the problem with sanctions -- experience from Cuba to Iraq and beyond shows that regimes adapt

to long-term sanctions, removing the leverage that any new measures could create over important decision makers. But nobody expects Western powers to escalate to any more direct forms of coercion against Assad of the sort now facing Libya's Colonel Gaddafi. Curious, perhaps, because Assad is the Arab leader most closely aligned with Iran, the enabler of Hizballah's military capability, and host to the headquarters of Hamas. His regime remains formally at war with Israel, and has been accused by Iraq's government of enabling the Sunni insurgency there. But that doesn't mean the U.S. or even Israel are ready to see the back of Bashar al-Assad. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton just a couple of weeks ago was still referring to him as a "reformer", and the Administration's policy had long been to woo his regime away from Iran.

Trying to topple it, by contrast, would be a geopolitical roll of the dice: The Western powers, and many Syrians, fear the regime's collapse would unleash a sectarian civil war that could spread into Lebanon and Iraq. And they fear that the Muslim Brotherhood would emerge as the strongest opposition group. Even for the Israeli security establishment, Assad is the devil they know, and there's an assumption that the Machiavellian calculations of Damascus actually function as a restraint on Hizballah -- the Israelis would make Syria pay a price for any sustained offensive launched by the movement, and the assumption has long been that negotiating a peace agreement with Damascus could cut off Hizballah's arms supplies and cool Syrian ties with Iran. If the regime goes, all bets are off. And it's fear of the power vacuum that gives many middle class Syrians, and international stakeholders, pause before committing to topple Assad. At the same time, however, the scale of the current rebellion suggests that it won't be as easily contained by the brutality unleashed in Hama, in 1982, to suppress an insurrection by the Muslim Brotherhood. The economic and social despair of too many Syrians

has stripped them of their fear; for a traditionally authoritarian regime the past month has seen previously unthinkable public defiance -- and it's not showing any sign of ending.

As a result, Landis predicts, the opposition will quickly turn to arms, as it did in Libya. The result, at least in the short term, may prove quite different. An armed rebellion is likely to eventually be led by the most intractable and battle-hardened opponents of the regime, which would be the Islamists. And at least in the short term, a turn to a more violent confrontation would likely reinforce the reluctance of the urban elites to back the rebellion. In the long term, he argues, their calculations will be changed by the likely economic collapse, which will eventually bring down the regime. But it could be a protracted and bloody demise.

Article 3.

Wall street Journal

The Tehran-Damascus Axis

Amir Taheri

APRIL 27, 2011 -- When the Arab uprisings started in Tunisia this winter, there were no more enthusiastic cheerleaders than the Khomeinists in Tehran. Their cheering got louder when revolution spread to Egypt, and louder still when Libyans rose in revolt. But Tehran's cheering has begun to fade. The reason is that the revolt has spread to Syria, the mullahs' sole Arab ally.

A sign that Tehran may be getting nervous came last week when the Islamic Majlis, Iran's ersatz parliament, published a report on "The Arab Revolution." The authors ask for "urgent action to protect our strategic interests" in case the regime of President Bashar Assad is toppled.

What kind of action? Syrian opposition sources claim that Tehran has sent snipers to help Mr. Assad kill demonstrators. The regime used this tactic during the protests following the disputed presidential election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009. (Neda Agha-Soltan, the young woman who became the symbol of the pro-democracy uprising in Iran, was killed by one such sniper.) President Barack Obama has also spoken of Iran's possible involvement in Syria. Whether or not Tehran has sent snipers to prop up Mr. Assad, the Islamic Republic is bound by treaty to help him fight "any threats against Syria's security and stability." Tehran and Damascus first signed a military cooperation treaty in 1998. At the time, Iran's minister of defense, Adm. Ali Shamkhani, stated publicly that the treaty would also cover "intelligence and security issues" with regard to dissident armed groups. Since then the treaty has been refined and

deepened on several occasions, most recently under Mr. Ahmadinejad in 2008.

Syria is the only country with which the Iranian armed forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps hold joint staff meetings at least once a year. Iran has also emerged as a major supplier of weapons and materiel to Syria, according to the official Iranian news agency IRNA.

Iran started using the Assad regime as a means of dividing the Arabs in the 1970s, when the shah wanted to squeeze the Baathist regime in Iraq. To this end, he supplied Syria with cut-price oil and aid totalling \$150 million in 1977. Under the mullahs, Syria retained its role in preventing the Arabs from ganging up against the then-fragile Islamic Republic. Throughout its eight-year war against Saddam Hussein, Iran benefited from Syrian support, including vital intelligence on Iraqi armed forces. As a gesture of goodwill, Tehran arranged for some mullahs to issue fatwas declaring the Alawite minority, to which the Assad family belongs, to be "part of Islam." Most Islamic scholars, on the other hand, have long regarded the esoteric Alawi sect as heretical.

Iran and Syria also share an interest in Lebanon. Syrian despots have always dreamt of annexing Lebanon. And under the shah, Iran regarded itself as the protector of Lebanon's Shiite community. Under the mullahs, Lebanon has been recast as "our revolution's perimeter of defense," in the words of Gen. Hassan Firuzabadi, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces. In a speech in Tehran last month, Gen. Firuzabadi justified Iran's support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and for Hamas in the Palestinian territories by underscoring the role that the two groups played in fighting "the Zionist enemy." And because of its geographical proximity, Syria plays a crucial role in channelling arms from Iran to both Hezbollah and Hamas.

Iranian-Syrian cooperation in Lebanon has a long history. In the words of Iran's former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, the countries worked together "to push the Americans out" with a suicide attack that killed 241 U.S. servicemen in 1983. In the decades that followed, Tehran and Damascus used Hezbollah in hostage-taking operations and assassinations of Western diplomats and Arab politicians. Under Mr. Ahmadinejad, Iran has expanded its presence in Syria significantly. At least 14 Iranian "Islamic Cultural Centres" have opened across Syria, and hundreds of mullah missionaries have been sent to introduce Iranian-style Shiism to Syrians. Similar tactics in Lebanon have succeeded in "Iranizing" a large chunk of the Lebanese Shiite community.

The Assad regime has a larger strategic importance for the Islamic Republic. "We want to be present in the Mediterranean," Mr. Ahmadinejad said in a speech last month in Tehran, marking the arrival in the Syrian port of Latakia of a flotilla of Iranian warships. This was the first time since 1975 that Iranian warships had appeared in the Mediterranean.

Indeed, Iran could build a presence in the Mediterranean through Syria and Lebanon. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has already developed mooring facilities in the Syrian port as a prelude to what may be a full-scale air and naval base.

Mr. Ahmadinejad, who believes that the United States is in historic retreat, sees Iran as the successor to the defunct Soviet Union as the principal global challenger to what he says is "a world system, imposed by Infidel powers." The loss of Syria would puncture many of Mr. Ahmadinejad's aspirations.

Over the years, it is possible that Iran has built a network of contact and sympathy within the Syrian military and security services. It may now be using that network to encourage hardliners within the beleaguered Assad regime to fight on.

From the start, Tehran media have labelled the Syrian uprising "a Zionist plot," the term they used to describe the pro-democracy movement in Iran itself. In 2009, the mullahs claimed that those killed in the streets of Tehran and Tabriz were not peaceful demonstrators but "Zionist and Infidel" agents who deserved to die. The Assad clan is using the same vicious vocabulary against freedom lovers in Syria as snipers kill them in the streets of Damascus, Deraa and Douma.

Mr. Taheri is the author of "The Persian Night: Iran Under the Khomeinist Revolution" (Encounter, 2009).

Article 4.

The Washington Post

Tom Donilon's Arab Spring challenge

David Ignatius

April 26 -- Tom Donilon, President Obama's national security adviser, has a reputation as a "process guy," meaning that he runs an orderly decision-making system at the National Security Council, and as a "political guy" with a feel for Capitol Hill and the media. Now, facing the rolling crisis of the Arab Spring, Donilon has had to transform into the ultimate "policy guy" — coordinating administration strategy for a revolution that will alter the foreign-policy map for decades.

U.S. strategy is still a work in progress. That's the consensus among some leading Donilon-watchers inside and outside the government. The national security adviser has tried to shape Obama's intuitive support for the Arab revolutionaries into a coherent line. But as the crisis has unfolded, there has been tension between American interests and values, and a communications-oriented NSC staff has sometimes seemed to oscillate between the two.

"The focus is more on how it plays than on what to do," says one longtime friend of Donilon. He credits Donilon as "a very smart political person" who has brought order to the planning process. But he cautions: "Tom is not a strategist. He's a pol. That's the heart of what he is and does."

Another member of the inner circle similarly credits Donilon as "very inclusive of all the principals in the decision-making process." But he worries that this White House is too focused on "message management."

The uprisings in Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen and now Syria all embody the tension between U.S. interests and values, and Obama

has leaned different ways. With Egypt and Libya, the White House voted its values and supported rebellion and change; with Bahrain and Yemen, the administration, while sympathetic to reform, has embraced its interests in the stability of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain's neighbor, and in a Yemen that is an ally against al-Qaeda.

The mix is pragmatic, which seems to suit both Obama and Donilon. Yet it sometimes frustrates ideologues on both sides who want a more systematic line. My instinct is that the White House is right to be pragmatic, and for that reason should avoid making so many public pronouncements: This is an evolving crisis, and each country presents a different set of issues; a one-size-fits-all policy approach would be a mistake.

The biggest test may come in Syria, where President Bashar al-Assad has launched a ruthless crackdown. Here, U.S. values and interests would seem to coincide in the fall of Assad, who is Iran's key Arab ally and maintains a repressive, anti-American regime. But there are dangers: Assad's fall could bring a sectarian bloodbath. So far, Donilon seems to be holding a middle ground to allow maximum U.S. flexibility.

In an interview in his West Wing office last week, Donilon outlined his basic strategic framework. It begins with Obama's intuitive feel for these issues. Back in January when the Arab revolts began, Obama admonished his NSC advisers, preoccupied with other issues: "You need to get on this!"

Donilon cites four guidelines that have shaped the administration's response ever since: First, the Arab revolt is a "historic" event, comparable to the fall of the Ottoman Empire or the post-1945 decolonization of the Middle East; second, "no country is immune" from change; third, the revolution has "deep roots" in poor governance, demographics and new communications technology; and

fourth, “these are indigenous events” that can’t be dictated by America, Iran or any other outside power.

Donilon also stresses that this process of change is just beginning. “We’re in the early chapters,” he says, warning that the United States should be careful not to take actions now that it might regret down the road, as situations change and new players emerge.

A useful reality check for Donilon was his trip this month to Saudi Arabia, which had been traumatized by Obama’s abandonment of deposed Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and America’s initial support for Bahrain’s Shiite protesters. Donilon met with Saudi King Abdullah for more than two hours and gave him a personal letter from Obama. The reassuring message, he says, was about “the bond we have in a relationship of 70 years that’s rooted in shared strategic interest.”

Donilon is preoccupied now by Syria. He doesn’t want to talk details of policy but says the administration will follow its basic principles of opposing violent repression and supporting reform. He says Assad made a disastrous mistake being “constipated” about change. As for a Libya-style intervention, Donilon seems dubious that a military option in Syria is available or advisable.

Article 5.

The National Interest

Bearbaiting Iran

Hossein Askari

April 26, 2011 -- Throughout the years, Saudi decision-making has been characterized by three fundamental principles—discretion, caution and cash. But last month, by deploying troops to Bahrain and lecturing Iran, the al-Sauds acted out of character. They sent an unintended invitation to Iran to intervene around the Persian Gulf, an invitation that Iran cannot refuse and one that might be the seed for the downfall of the al-Sauds and other GCC monarchies.

First some essential background. The al-Sauds, and more generally the Bedouins from Najd, have harbored a visceral hatred for Shia Muslims and especially for Iranians, but said and did nothing during the Shah's reign given the Shah's military might and his close relations with the United States. Then the Iranian Revolution brought the Shia-Sunni divide and Iran's revolutionary zeal to the top of the list of Saudi concerns. The al-Sauds believe the mullahs are untrustworthy and determined to destabilize Saudi rule. The Iran-Iraq War in all its savagery was a gift for the al-Sauds. Iranians and Iraqis killing each other was the best of both worlds; Shia were killing Shia and their two rivals in the Persian Gulf were decimating each other. The conflict fueled even more hatred between Iran and Iraq, further dividing the two for years to come, and leaving them little time and few resources to destabilize Saudi Arabia. Although the Saudis and their GCC allies put up mountains of cash to support Saddam Hussein, it was a worthwhile investment. After the bloody war, the period of standoff between the two Shia powers afforded the al-Sauds continued comfort. It appeared that devastation from the war, along

with sanctions and continued policy ineptitude, would keep both countries backward for years to come.

But Saddam's invasion of Kuwait jolted the al-Sauds. Acting out of character, they threw caution to the wind and invited US forces onto Saudi soil to drive Saddam out of Kuwait and, more importantly, to defend Saudi Arabia from an Iraqi invasion. True to form, the al-Sauds did what they do best—greased the wheels with cash. They, along with Kuwait and Abu Dhabi, paid the US for its war-related expenses, prompting the al-Sauds to believe that the US was a mercenary country with high-profile Americans and their military might for sale. As a result of the war, the rest of the GCC, especially Kuwait—which, ironically, had previously thought itself a power to be reckoned with—began to look up to Saudi leadership.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent ascendance of Shia to power there was a new blow to Saudi ambitions. Their worst nightmare was coming true. While they had hated Saddam Hussein, they saw him as useful in keeping Iraqi Shia in check and providing a counterweight to Iran. Hoping for a reversal given the ongoing turmoil in Iraq, the al-Sauds did little to discourage Saudi suicide bombers from going to Baghdad. But matters did not go as the al-Sauds hoped, and the Shia maintained their power in Iraq.

Today, the al-Sauds feel threatened as never before. The Arab Spring has toppled two allies and is threatening others in the region. While Arabs in the street are trading full stomachs for dignity, representative rule, a more equitable share of oil wealth and a say in their political and economic future, the US appears to be abandoning its so-called friends in support of the revolutionaries. The Saudis believe the coming clash in the Persian Gulf is likely to be along the Shia-Sunni divide. But instead of proceeding as they have in the past, the al-Sauds are reacting viscerally against the Shia uprising in

Bahrain and have stepped into a hornet's nest that may well be the opening gambit to a Shia-Sunni clash across the Persian Gulf. The Shia in Bahrain, though treated as second-class citizens, have fared significantly better than their counterparts in Saudi Arabia and had not even considered overthrowing the al-Khalifas in the past. They have always wanted something along the lines of a constitutional monarchy with the al-Khalifas at the helm, but with more rights and representation. Unfortunately, the al-Khalifas are not free to respond to the legitimate demands of their Shia citizens because they are beholden to the al-Sauds, who finance them and their country. Thousands of Saudi visitors fuel the island's economy on weekends. Bahrain provides a base for the US Fifth Fleet, something the Saudis can ill afford to do on their own soil. The Shia are the overwhelming majority (70 percent) on the island, but they are being oppressed as never before because the al-Sauds want it so. Why? The Saudis fear that more humane treatment of the Shia in Bahrain would fuel demands and dissent among their own disenfranchised Shia, representing 10-15 percent of their population. So the al-Khalifas must mistreat their Shia to be in step with the mistreatment of Shia in Saudi Arabia! They have brought in Sunni mercenaries to man security forces and have granted them and other Sunnis a quick route to citizenship in order to marginalize the Shia majority in Bahrain. They have "invited" Saudi forces to put down the protestors in Bahrain. They have declared a State of Emergency. They have, reportedly, signed secret contacts with Mossad (WP, April 12, 2011). They have surrounded the largest public hospital in Bahrain. They have arrested numerous doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers and paramedics who treat injured protestors. Checkpoints have been set up where soldiers arrest citizens who show evidence of wounds which could indicate they have participated in protests. They

have entered homes in the night and arrested alleged protestors. All this and more they have done at the insistence of their Saudi masters. Up to now, there is little evidence that Iran has interfered in Bahrain—if it has, its activities have been marginal. The Bahraini Shia have done all they can to distance themselves from the Iranian regime, believing that any association with Iran would bring the wrath of the Saudis on them. Besides, Iran's economic, social and political achievements are nothing to envy or replicate. All this may now change. How do we expect Iran to react to this blatant reign of terror against Shia instigated by the Saudis with complicity on the part of rulers in Bahrain, the UAE and Kuwait? How will Iran react to being lectured for allegedly interfering in the region? What can we expect Iran to do in response to being overtly threatened by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait? How will their response be further conditioned by Washington's recent admission of covert operations inside Iran? Before gauging the Iranian response, we should note the mindset of those who matter in Iran's intelligence services and in its Revolutionary Guards. They are street smart and tough. Their relations with Persian Gulf Arabs are conditioned by history. They don't react well to threats, especially from Saudis and Kuwaitis, whom they hold in contempt. They know that today the US could still defend their client dictators, but with difficulty. While the Iranians were in awe of the US as it marched with ease into Baghdad, things are different today. The US is overstretched, fighting two wars in Muslim countries and lending support in yet another. Its finances are near the breaking point, giving it limited ability to confront Iran in the Persian Gulf—much less in Lebanon, Afghanistan and Iraq. Most importantly, only Iran knows how close it is to having a nuclear device. Even the threat of the use of nuclear capability, real or imaginary, would seriously limit GCC and US options.

What is Iran's reaction likely to be? Tehran will have to decide where and how to undermine Arab rulers in the Persian Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, along with their protector the United States. Iran has no choice but to stand up for Shia rights if it wants to play a regional role now and in the future. The Saudi misstep affords Iran the perfect invitation to take on such a role more overtly and with much more justification than in the past. What sense of justice could allow Saudi Arabia to enter into Bahrain with force, to kill peaceful Shia protestors and rob them of their basic human rights, but outlaw Iran coming to the defense of oppressed Shia?

Iran's priority will be to foment dissent and protest in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, home to Saudi Shia and the location of Saudi Arabia's major oil facilities, where it can hurt the al-Sauds the most. The next likely target will be Kuwait. Here, it can count on the support of Iraqi Shia. Yes, Kuwait is grateful for Saudi support—but can a little country wedged between Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and with a 30 percent Shia minority, afford such high-profile rhetoric against Iran? While Saddam's invasion of Kuwait was predictable years before it happened, I believe that today the reasons that the Kuwaiti regime will be undermined by Iran and Iraq in partnership in the next five or so years are even more compelling. Who will rescue Kuwait the next time around, especially if Iran claims a nuclear capability? Saudi Arabia?

What can the US do to prevent a potential uncontrollable catastrophe in the Persian Gulf? The US must stop pandering to al-Saud wishes in Bahrain and elsewhere. If the US administration is seen as accepting Saudi and Bahraini repression while taking a stand against repression elsewhere in the region, then it will lose the last shred of credibility it may still enjoy in that part of the world. The US must be tough with the al-Sauds as never before and force them to allow the Shia in Bahrain to gain their legitimate rights and to afford equal rights to

their own Shia Muslims. Hopefully, the recent visit of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to King Abdullah and the presidential letter delivered by National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon conveyed such a message and not the one that we have become accustomed to—pandering to al-Saud wishes for “access” to oil that we pay for. The US cannot afford to turn its back on the Shia in the Persian Gulf. This is one of those times in history when the US must connect all the dots before choosing its policy course.

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Article 6.

Agence Global

The New Pan-Arabism

Patrick Seale

26 Apr 2011 -- Although the future is uncertain and danger still lurks at every street corner, Arab society could be experiencing an inspiring moment of renewal. Spreading with contagious euphoria across the Middle East, popular uprisings are providing the Arabs with an immense opportunity, such as occurs rarely, perhaps only in every three or four generations. The opportunity must not be squandered.

Although much blood has been spilled -- in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria and elsewhere -- fresh blood has, at the same time, been infused into a senile and decaying political system. Heavy-handed methods of repression and coercion are being swept away, which for decades condemned the Arabs to stagnation and backwardness. A surge of “people power” is dismantling the suffocating controls of the Arab security state. The Arabs are being freed from captivity.

Right across the region, the young and the not-so-young are united in long-stifled aspirations. Formulating the same demands for political freedom, economic opportunity and, above all, dignity, they call out to each other across national boundaries, copying each other, drawing encouragement from each other’s experience. The Arab peoples are responding to each other as never before.

Satellite television and internet communications have undoubtedly succeeded in creating a sense of community, informing Arab societies about each other, ventilating common problems, linking Maghreb to Mashrek. Social networks such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have also played a role in bringing the Arabs together.

Had it not been for such new inventions, the spark lit in Tunisia by the self-immolation of a young street vendor might not have set fire to the combustible, pent-up grievances of Egypt, which in turn inspired revolts in Libya, Yemen, Syria and elsewhere.

But something more profound is at work. As autocracies are brought down, the region seems to be experiencing a new pan-Arab moment. More genuine than that promoted in the past by individual leaders such as Gamal Abd al-Nasser or his rivals in the Ba‘th party, this incipient pan-Arabism is a union of peoples, rather than a union of leaders for their own geopolitical ambitions. Political pan-Arabism was a failure. Will popular pan-Arabism be more successful? Will Arab solidarity be more than an empty slogan?

In the coming weeks and months, there will clearly be an opportunity for the Arabs to recover their corporate voice and their corporate power, an opportunity to overcome their internal disputes and resolve their external conflicts, an opportunity to promote Arab causes, an opportunity to rid themselves of foreign predators and take their destiny into their own hands. But will they seize it? Will new leaders emerge with the vision to lead their peoples out of the failures of the past and towards new horizons?

The last time something of this nature happened was a century ago when the Ottoman Empire was defeated in the First World War. After four centuries of Ottoman rule, some Arabs saw in the Empire’s collapse an opportunity for a national awakening. Demands were formulated for freedom, self-determination and unity. But the nascent Arab nationalism of the time was brutally crushed -- by the imperial ambitions of Britain and France; by the quest for statehood of the Zionist movement, which flourished under British protection; and also, it must be said, by Arab rivalries, which remain to this day a source of weakness and paralysis.

The fathers and grandfathers of the present generation fought for

freedom from the colonial powers -- in Egypt, Iraq, and South Yemen against the British; in Syria and across North Africa against the French; in Libya against the Italians; in Palestine against the Zionists. But today's revolution is primarily against internal rather than external colonists.

The post-revolutionary period is bound to be chaotic. There will be instability, fierce infighting while new political parties are formed and new forces take shape, even attempts here and there at counter-revolution. Faced with popular uprisings, those Arab rulers still in place will inevitably look to their defences. But they should not miss the import of what is happening. They should embrace the new trend rather than fight it.

It seems to me, and no doubt to many other observers, that three developments are necessary at this historic moment if the Arab Revolution is to succeed.

The first is that those Arab monarchies which have so far been spared popular uprisings must themselves introduce and implement far-reaching reforms. Ruling families need to open their ranks to ordinary citizens; representative institutions need to be created; shoura councils or parliaments must be given real responsibility; accountability insisted upon; corruption curbed; arbitrary arrest and police brutality ended. In a word, power must be shared and the people's energies harnessed for the common good.

A second development will be even more difficult to bring about, but is perhaps even more important. Sectarianism is the curse of Arab societies. What does it matter if an Arab man or woman is a Sunni or a Shi'i, an Alawi, an Ismaili or a Derzi, a Christian or a Muslim? Political and religious authorities across the region should make a resolute attempt to consign sectarian differences and conflicts to history. What alone matters is that Arabs -- whether male or female, rich or poor, and whatever their backgrounds or religious beliefs --

should feel and behave as Arab citizens. It is surely time to launch an Arab Union based on common citizenship to match the European Union, which the Europeans managed to create over the past half-century.

A third necessary development is a recognition that oil wealth belongs not just to a few privileged Arabs but to all of them. It must be shared across the region. Generosity is, after all, the greatest of Arab virtues. The oil-poor countries will need help from their richer brothers. Solidarity is meaningless if it is not backed with cash. Just as Western Europe pumped billions into the poorer parts of Eastern Europe after the Soviet collapse, so the oil-rich Arabs must urgently come to the aid of their poorer neighbours. With oil prices at near-record levels, it is a scandal that the great majority of Arabs still scrape a living on two dollars a day or less.

Youth unemployment is the number one problem of the Arab world. In country after country it has been the real motor of the revolution. A great bank or fund needs to be set up which, by tapping into Arab sovereign wealth funds, would be dedicated to creating jobs across the region. Countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Syria and others, need massive aid, well-directed and managed, if the democratic movement is not to collapse in disillusion and despair. If it does, no one will be spared.

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Article 7.

Foreign Affairs

The Post-Islamist Revolutions - What the Revolts in the Arab World Mean

Asef Bayat

April 26, 2011 -- How should we make sense of the revolts that have engulfed the Arab world? Some observers see them as postmodern revolutions, diffused and leaderless, with no fixed ideology. Others view them as the next wave of democratic and liberal revolutions. Most commonly, they are described as youth revolutions, since young people played a key role in initiating them. Still others argue that they may be Islamist revolutions and will turn the region into a theocracy resembling Iran. In the United States, this is the position that many Republicans hold. The Iranian hard-liners concur, insisting that the Arab revolts are inspired by Iran's 1979 Islamic takeover. Religious factions have been involved in the Arab protests to an extent -- al-Nahda has in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood has in Egypt and Syria, and the Islamic opposition has in Yemen, for example. But in truth, the revolutions transcend the Islamist politics that reigned in the region just a few years ago. In a 2008 essay on the future of Islamic revolutions, I suggested that the Iranian experience "may well remain the first and the last Islamic Revolution of our time," for the "growth of democratic sensibilities and movements [in the Middle East] is likely to push Islamism into the 'post-Islamist' course, paving the way for a democratic change in which an inclusive Islam may play a significant role. The outcome may be termed 'post-Islamist refo-lutions' [a mix of reforms and revolutions]."

Post-Islamism is not anti-Islamic or secular; a post-Islamist movement dearly upholds religion but also highlights citizens' rights.

It aspires to a pious society within a democratic state. Early examples of such movements include the reform movement in Iran in the late 1990s and the country's Green Movement today, Indonesia's Prosperous Justice Party, Egypt's Hizb al-Wasat, Morocco's Justice and Development Party (PJD), and Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Each was originally fundamentalist but over time came to critique Islamist excess, its violation of democratic rights, and its use of religion as a tool to sanctify political power. They all eventually opted to work within the democratic state.

The protest movements underlying the current revolutions seem set to follow these earlier post-Islamist experiments. So far, religious rhetoric has been remarkably absent, even though the participants of the Middle East's many uprisings remain overwhelmingly people of faith. In Tunisia, protesters' central objective was to establish a democratic government. Rachid al-Ghannouchi, the founder of Tunisia's main Islamist party -- Islamic Nahda -- has publicly rejected a Khomeini-style state and has declined to run for president in future elections. Similarly, in Egypt the revolution demanded "change, freedom, and social justice" and was broadly secular. In fact, the major religious groups -- Gamaiyya Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyah, a Salafi movement that controls 500 mosques and scores of schools and associations; al-Azhar, the main establishmentarian Islamic institution; and the Coptic Church did not initially back the revolution. The Muslim Brotherhood's old guard joined reluctantly and only after being pushed by the group's younger members.

Libya's rebel movement and provisional government, the National Council, is composed not of Islamists or al Qaeda members but of a mix of the secular and faithful, including doctors, lawyers, teachers, regime defectors, and activists working to end Muammar al-Gaddafi's oppression. According to their spokesman, Abdul Hafidh

Ghoga, a human rights lawyer, Islamist presence is minimal, since the country's Islamists were, for the most part, crushed by Qaddafi long ago. And in Yemen and Syria, where protesters are also demanding democracy, there has also been no evidence of a major Islamist presence. In Bahrain, of course, the protests have taken on a sectarian dimension, since the monarchy is Sunni and the population is Shia, but the mainstream opposition still has largely secular demands: an elected government, a free press, the right to establish organizations, and the end to religious discrimination.

Today's overwhelmingly civil and secular revolts represent a departure from the Arab politics of the mid-1980s and 1990s. Bolstered by Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, in those days the political class was consumed by the idea of establishing an Islamic order, including a religious state and sharia. Their primary goal was to forge an ideological community through which secular concerns would be addressed. For Islamists, the state was seen as the most powerful and efficient institution for spreading "good" and eradicating "evil." In turn, Islamists viewed citizens as dutiful subjects and placed an emphasis on their obligations to the righteous state, with little concern for their rights.

The means for achieving such an order differed depending on the group. Militant Islamists, such as Egypt's al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, took up arms in the 1990s to dislodge the secular states. The moderates, or electoral Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhoods in various Arab countries, preferred da'wa (religious outreach) and working within the system to achieve gradual Islamist change. The militants and the moderates were united by their hostility toward the West. But their shared goals and enemies could not completely reconcile their differences on foreign policy. Shia militant groups, such as Iraq's Hizb al-Dawa and Lebanon's Hezbollah, allied with Iran, while their Sunni counterparts remained closer to Saudi Arabia.

Arab authoritarian states unintentionally sowed the seeds of their own demise. In the 1980s and 1990s, as populations grew and urbanized, demand for rights -- specifically for paid and secure jobs, decent housing and amenities, and respect -- rose. Of course, the economies of Arab countries could not keep pace with the demands. Throughout the 1980s, massive urban riots shook major Arab cities. Rather than taking on welfare tasks themselves, Arab governments, following the neoliberal economic agendas popular in the 1990s, tasked the growing sector of religious charities and nongovernmental organizations with providing help. Yet these arrangements proved too feeble to ameliorate the deep poverty and inequality that plague Middle Eastern societies. Indeed, the combination of new economic policies and a weak safety net increased the income gap between the rich and poor, made the working middle class more economically vulnerable, and marginalized much of the educated middle class. The last two decades saw the expansion of a "middle-class poor". This paradoxical class obtained college degrees, enjoyed contact with the rest of the world, used digital forms of communication, and expected a middle-class lifestyle, only to be forced to live in poverty with few prospects for improvement. Similar to the other disenfranchised groups in the Arab world, such as the marginal poor, women, and youth, the middle-class poor quietly struggled to improve their life chances. Many Muslim women strove to assert their presence in public, go to college, and pursue justice in courts. Youths forged collective identities in colleges, tea shops, and online and they attempted to affirm their autonomy and change politics by engaging in civil society and volunteer work. Yet these efforts mostly fell short. (The youth would only become a real threat to the regime in mid-2010, when social media facilitated their collective mobilization against entrenched regimes.) In the 1990s then, the most

serious political challenge to the Arab regimes was the Islamist opposition, which much of the middle-class poor supported. But recently, Islamism began to lose its appeal considerably, and the Iranian model of revolution lost much of its luster. The regime's reputation for repression, misogyny, exclusionary attitudes, and unfulfilled promises became widely recognized, alienating its onetime sympathizers. Al Qaeda's violence, moreover, had caused a backlash against ordinary Muslims, who found al Qaeda's practices abhorrent to the true spirit of Islam. Much of the faithful in the Arab world decried the Islamists' disregard for human rights, tolerance, and pluralism. They could no longer accept the exploitation of Islam as a tool for procuring power and privilege. To rescue Islam, they began to abandon the Islamic state. At the same time, the political class realized that its nationalist, anti-imperialist, and pro-Palestinian campaign would falter so long as it was associated with the demagogic rhetoric of the authoritarian regimes. Thus, the next logical step was to focus on a key internal issue: democracy. The beginnings of a post-Islamist vision were first evident in Egypt in 2000, when a group called the Popular Committee for Solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada managed to bring together youth, civil society, and political activists to stage mass rallies in Tahrir Square against Israeli sieges of Palestinian territories. But it was the 2004 Kefaya (Enough) movement that heralded the coming of post-Islamist democratic politics: it focused more on democracy and human rights at home than on politics abroad, and it bridged ideological divides, especially between religious and secular activists and between leftists and nationalists. In doing so, it transcended exclusivist Islamist politics. This new way of doing politics in the post 9/11 era eventually influenced the inner circle of Islamism, compelling activists and ideologues, such as the youth in the Muslim Brotherhood, to rethink

their political project. Many groups -- including the reformers in Iran and Indonesia's Prosperous Justice Party -- explicitly departed from their earlier vision of Islamism. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood took piecemeal and pragmatic steps toward recognizing the legitimacy of democracy, the separation of powers, and minority rights -- when the Kefaya movement and former U.S. President George W. Bush's rhetoric of democratization pushed it to do so in the late 2000s. Post-Islamism emerged as a frame within which religious politics could become more inclusive. Muslims could confidently remain Muslim but also have a democratic state -- as Turkey's example indicated. And as electronic media expanded, Muslim and secular activists alike had an unprecedented opportunity to communicate, mobilize, and place their democratic demands on the agenda. Thus, by late 2010, an invigorated new public with a novel political vision and means of achieving it had emerged; ready to lead the current revolts.

It remains to be seen whether the post-Islamist vision can be sustained after the revolutionary fervor subsides. There is certainly the possibility of a renewed fundamentalism. Already in Egypt, Salafists who opposed the revolution are regrouping in the mosques and on the street with a message that democracy is haram (forbidden). Salafis may be able to galvanize some support by capitalizing on moral and religious issues. One thing is clear, however: democrats, whether faithful or secular, have a heavy task before them. They must work to bring democratic values from the rule books to mobilize the ordinary people. If Salafis can do grass-roots work, so should democratic forces.

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